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S E R M O N S

ON

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS,

BY THE LATE REVEREND

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OF GRAY'S-INN,

CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO HIS MAJESTY,
AND

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL AND ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETIES,

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE CHARACTER
OF THE AUTHOR,

BY HIS SON.

IN TWO VOLUMES,
VOL. II.

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IN TWO VOLUMES
VOL. I.

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GOD'S FORBEARANCE WITH
SINNERS.

LUKE xiii. 6, 7, 8, 9.

A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he to the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none — cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it; and if it bear fruit — well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

OUR Saviour, in the verses immediately preceding this parable, is exhorting the Jews to repentance; and gives them this strong warning — “Except ye repent, ye shall perish.” The parable then, as it follows close upon this lesson of our Saviour, may

well be esteemed a part of it, and consequently must be understood as pointing to repentance.

In this parable our Saviour plainly tells the Jews, that God had long borne with their unfruitful behaviour, in expectation of their growing better; that he is still inclined to bear with them a little longer; but that, if they still persist in their impenitence, destruction must be their doom.

History shews us how exactly each part of this parable was verified on the Jews;—how long God had cultivated, instructed, and borne with that people—speaking to them himself, and by his prophets, whom he sent among them—encouraging them with blessings, chastising them with judgments, banishing them, then recalling them, and at last sending his Son among them; their treatment of whom filled up the measure of their wickedness and impenitence.—Yet, we know that, after all this, God did bear with them a little time longer—and it was but a little time—for, finding them still impenitent, he sent the Romans, within about forty years after this warning of our Saviour, who totally destroyed their city and nation.

We have therefore before us not only our Saviour's lesson for repentance illustrated by his parable, but we have his parable exemplified in what befel the Jews. And both together shew, that the intent of God's forbearance with sinners is, to lead them to repentance; and that the consequence of not answering such intent will be destruction.

Let each of us reflect but ever so little on our condition, on the abilities and means which God hath allowed us for being good; and we shall see ourselves as a fig-tree planted in the vineyard of our God; on which he hath bestowed all that culture and care which is necessary to make us fruitful, and which therefore gives him a right to come and expect we should be so. The advantages we enjoy in being Christians, and that too in a country where Christianity is held in its greatest purity, and where the gospel is daily opened and taught among us — these general advantages, I say, qualify us all for being made acquainted with the duty God expects from us. There are none among us, let their condition in life be ever so low, on whom God hath not sufficiently bestowed the abilities and means of being good — if they will apply them. — There are few, on whom he

hath not bestowed them abundantly. Was each of us to look back on what we have met with since we set forth in life, and recount the several calls, instructions, opportunities, and encouragements to duty, which have attended us, each in our several paths through life, we must acknowledge the sufficient, the abundant care of God in supplying us with the means and abilities of being good. The best among us hardly shew forth fruit in proportion to the culture they have had; but how many are we, who, like the fig-tree in the parable, shew forth none!

We shall find too, when we seriously look into ourselves, and back into our past lives, that as God hath abundantly supplied us with the means and abilities of being good, so he has abundantly spared us in our neglect and misuse of them. — Fully sensible of our duty, how tardy have we been in resolving to pursue it! and those resolutions how soon and how frequently broken! So that God hath come year after year, expecting fruit from us, and hath found none; — nay, when, beyond a mere neglect of duty, our conduct hath been such, as led through wickedness to ruin, God hath borne with our wickedness, and, instead of calling down destruction, hath withheld that which

which was naturally falling upon us.—Why all this? — why such suffering and forbearance of God? Is it that God takes pleasure in our wickedness? or, that he is unconcerned about it? Is it that he hath not purpose, or that he hath not power, to punish us? — No — the apostle's answer is the true one — “ God is long-suffering to us-ward, “ because he is not willing that any should “ perish, but that all should come to re-
“ pentance.”

If such be the intention of God in his forbearance with us, our behaviour should be suitable to it, and we should diligently apply it to those purposes for which it is allowed us. — What are we doing then, when, instead of using God's forbearance as an occasion for growing better, we take occasion from it for growing worse? — This surely is great ingratitude, in despising the goodness of God, and great madness in seeking our own destruction. — For let us attend to the parable — “ If “ it bear fruit, well; if not, after that thou “ shalt cut it down.” — If then the goodness of God be too weak to move us, at least let the fear of his righteous anger awaken us.

But we are very apt to apply our thoughts to the different attributes of God, according

to the different occasions we feel for them; and thus we learn to judge of God's conduct, and to direct our own, by a partial consideration of this or that attribute taken separately and by itself, and not by a consideration of them taken all together, as we ought to do. When we want to find fault with God's conduct, we make all our demand upon his justice, and forget his mercy; when we want to protect our own, we insist on his mercy, and forget his justice. But, notwithstanding our partial manner of considering God's attributes, they are really inseparable from each other, and operate together; as his justice is ever tempered with mercy, so his mercy will ever be supported by justice. — It is so in his treatment of sinners — God's mercy is concerned in bearing with them for a time, and his justice is concerned in punishing them at last.

We should therefore look forward to God's justice, which, as we learn from the parable before us, will take place, when his mercy and forbearance have been sufficiently, but unsuccessfully, applied. Of that sufficiency God alone is the judge. The parable shews us, that, as God forbears with sinners, so there are limits set to such forbearance; but
where

where those limits are set, it does not mean to shew us. God may set them at a shorter or longer time, within the common period of human life, as he sees occasion, or, he may permit his forbearance to reach as far as that period extends. This difference, in shewing more or less forbearance, must be left to the same wisdom and goodness, which allows us any forbearance at all. We may be assured God allows sufficient to all; and, however he may cut down unfruitful and unrepentant sinners, some sooner, some later, yet he dispenses his forbearance to them all, as he once dispensed his manna to the Israelites; he who has much has no more than is requisite, and he who has little has as much as is sufficient — God dealeth it to each man severally, as their several conditions require.

True it is, that death is the common condition of our nature; yet this hinders not, but that it may be, at the same time, the effect and consequence of sin. The sentence of death was so, and the particular execution of that sentence, as that lies in the same hand, may, in many instances, be so too. — All men die, whether they be good or bad; yet we evidently see many men die, not merely because they are men, but because they are

wicked men; and how many more may die for the same reason, though we do not evidently see it, is more than we can tell.—This we know, that life and death are in the hands of God, and that, though he has appointed a natural term for human life, yet, daily experience shews us, that he hath not tied up his own will and power during that term, but takes us away sooner or later, and in what manner he thinks fit. God, who allows us his forbearance, sees what use we make of it, and knows when he has allowed us sufficient;—when he sees that, he may remove us, either in a manner which publicly testifies his judgment, and distinguishes our unfruitful condition, or in a manner which does not. Many such public testimonies and distinctions God may think fit to give us, as fit remembrancers of his justice, and warnings that there are limits set to his forbearance with sinners.—The business of our present state requires *some* such lessons; but God need not set his mark on *every* unrepenting sinner that dies, to tell the world he has exhausted his measure of forbearance—the business of the future state will shew it.

Let us take good heed then—and, since our life is dispensed to us by the same hand which
dispenses

dispenses our forbearance, let us be very careful how we dally with blessings, on which so much depends, and which we know not how soon may be discontinued. — Let us consider, that the hour of our death, whenever it happens, sets us in effect before the tribunal of Christ; and let us seriously dread the thought of being called to that judgment unprepared. The mercy of God to man, through Christ's merits and mediation, is indeed sure and infinite; but the same revelation, which tells us this, tells us likewise, that it is sure only to those who accept and apply it. What then shall we do, when we have all our life long neglected, despised, and abused it? — It is promised to our repentance; — but what shall we do, if we have no repentance to plead? We may reason, as we please, on the infinity of God's mercy, and feed ourselves with the persuasion, that it must extend to all; — but the infinite mercy of God is one thing, and the infinite mercy of God despised and abused, is another; the former pitied fallen man, and found out a remedy for his recovery; but, that the latter will embrace and reward ungrateful, obstinate, and contemptuous man, reason dares not whisper to us, and revelation expressly contradicts.

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We may reason too, as we please, and place our hopes, on the sufficiency of a death-bed repentance;—but what will become of all our arguments, and our hopes, should we be cut down without being allowed time for repentance? — How are we sure we shall be laid in our beds to die? — Or, if we be, how are we sure we shall be in a condition to repent, when we are laid there? — What then shall we do, when we are called to judgment? — shall we reproach God, that, at the conclusion of our lives, he did not allow us a few minutes for repentance;—or, will he not rather reproach us, that, having allowed us our whole life for repentance, we have all along neglected his calls, abused his forbearance, and refused to set about it?

Let us consider this in time:—in short, let us this instant set about that important work, which, perhaps, is only this instant to be done.

Let us look back, and seriously consider—some of us, how wicked we have been, in opposition and contempt of the means of goodness, which have been set before us; others, what little or no improvement they have made in the application of them; and how very

very short even the best of us fall of that improvement which they might and ought to have made : — let all, and each of us, reflect what particular instances of God's mercy and forbearance we have met with in the course of our lives — what calls — what warnings — what encouragements — and what deliverances ; — and then, looking into ourselves, and finding, upon an impartial search of our hearts and our behaviour, so little fruit, if not so much barrenness and utter desolation, we shall feel reason to acquiesce in the Lord of the vineyard's question, and order to his vine-dresser, — “ Why cumbereth it the ground ? — “ cut it down ; ” — and may well shudder at the thought, that, even now, the fatal stroke may be levelled at our root.

Or, if God be still pleased to bear with us, let us remember what the parable describes — “ Let it alone *this year* also ; ” — three years past of unfruitfulness are followed but by one year more of farther trial — the more forbearance we have already abused, the less remains for a continuance of our trial. — With many of us the greater part of our natural life is gone by, neither can we assure ourselves of the remainder ; — but, who knows how much of God's forbearance with him is past and gone,
and

and whether there be much or little of that still left to be allowed him?

God grant we may lay these things seriously to heart, and immediately set ourselves to repentance. — The approaching season of Lent places us before God, with the vine-dresser's petition in our mouths — "Lord, let us alone this year also." — May God, of his mercy, accept this petition from us — and give us grace, that we may apply what future forbearance he thinks fit to allow us in such care and cultivation of our hearts, as may hereafter bring forth the fruit he expects from us — that so we may be suffered to continue in his vineyard till, in his own good time, he removes us into his kingdom.

SERMON XXXIX.

ABSTAINING FROM FLESHLY LUSTS.

I PETER ii. 11.

I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.

HERE are two reasons assigned for abstaining from fleshly lusts;—one is, that an indulgence of them is unsuitable to our present condition;—the other is, that it hurts the soul. A prudent man and a Christian will think these weighty reasons.

The adapting our behaviour to our condition is prudence; in the case before us, it is not only prudence, but religion; which teaches us, that we are here only in a state of pilgrimage. Now religion requires practice as well as faith; therefore, if we believe we

are

are pilgrims, we ought — religion obliges us — to behave as such ; that is, not to fix our affections on the things of this world, for that is behaving as if we were at home, but to use them as pilgrims use the conveniences they meet with — be glad to apply them, but ready to leave them.

There are three things which, in our pilgrimage here, are very apt to engross our affections ; they are pleasure, wealth, and honour ; either of these have power to make a pilgrim stop, but when they join their invitation, as they frequently do, they too often prevail upon him to set up his staff, and look no farther.

1. As to pleasure — there are several kinds of it. The grosser kinds of pleasure, which are called sensual, arising from the gratification of the grosser passions, are plainly not suited to the welfare of our condition. They become not our rational character, but are quite inconsistent with our immortal one. With our best management of them, they deserve not our boast, and without it we ought to be ashamed of them. They hurt the body as well as the soul ; — they are vices — which we ought, not only to shun, but to detest ; and, setting immortal life and glory out

out of the question, they who would enjoy human life and reputation will carefully avoid them.

There are other pleasures, which indeed are not ranked under the title of vices, but which, if not prudently managed, will come under the title of fleshly lusts, and, as such, must be avoided. — When God places us in this life, he does not mean to forbid us the innocent enjoyments belonging to it; but, as God intends us for another life, he means that we should not eagerly desire and study the enjoyments belonging only to the present — which are called fleshly, as they are suited only to our present state of flesh, or human nature; these, when pursued with attention and study, are called lusts, as that word signifies an eager desire and study to accomplish what we desire. — Such as have their thoughts wholly employed about the vanities and gay amusements of the world, and study how to improve every diversion that comes in their way — these indulge fleshly lusts — that is, they eagerly affect the pleasures of this life, and which belong to this life only. Such disposition and conduct, though arising from objects that belong to the world about us, yet suit not our duty in it; because those who

eagerly

eagerly affect the pleasures of life, must neglect the proper business of it. They find their minds dissipated and enervated by a pursuit of them, which not only disqualifies them for the duties of their station, and for discharging a sensible, useful, and respectable character in this life, but gives them a distaste to the dictates and duties of religion, which should prepare them for a happy entrance upon the next—for which they can hardly be fit, if they never think about it till they are called into it.

The duty, then, of abstaining from the enjoyments of the world consists not in totally depriving ourselves of them—for this would as little suit our present state as an immoderate indulgence in them; but it consists in a moderate and discreet use of them, ever jealous of their encroachments upon us, and careful that we do not suffer them to lay hold of our hearts, to displace our business, or to obstruct our religion. — The pleasures of the world are ready to attend us upon our entrance into it, and great caution should be used in accepting their invitation. The young mind may receive a hurt from them, which shall cripple it through life; and the religion men throw away, to run after pleasures, in the beginning of
their

their days, they may in vain seek to recover at the latter end of them.

2. Other passions meet us in our advance farther into the world ; where the objects of wealth and honour strike our attention — but however they may strike our attention they should not engage our affection ; however allowable and necessary their use, yet an eager desire and love for them, and an anxious study in the pursuit of them, beyond what is necessary, come under the denomination of *fleshy lusts*, are unsuitable to our condition as pilgrims, and hurt the soul.

It may be useless perhaps to set this remark before those, who are in the pursuit, or in the enjoyment, of wealth and honour ; because every man claims to judge for himself how far his own necessity extends, and to feel for himself how high his own desires arise ; and it will be easy for him to answer the remark, either by disowning an eager love of what he seeks or enjoys, or, by pleading the reasonable necessity he has for it. — But still, men will judge of each other, as well as for themselves, and every man's apparent condition in life will shew, in a good degree, his reasonable necessities, and his behaviour will discover the nature and degree of his desires. The remark,

however, which condemns this eager affection, will be true, wherever such affection is subsisting, difficult as it may be to point out where it is, and every man will feel it in himself, faster than he will own it to others.

That men may have an eager desire and love for riches and honour needs no proof; that this is absurd, when we consider the transient nature of our present life, and mischievous, when we consider the effect it works on the mind, is as true. The goods of this life are indeed suitable to the nature of it, and a reasonable desire and use of them is no less suitable to us who are placed in it; but an eager love of them is not suitable to the nature of this life, or to us, as this life is not only transient, but variable, and we are here only as passengers to what lies beyond us, and an eager love of this world is a hindrance, not only to our improvement in righteousness here, but, to our expectation of happiness hereafter.

God hath placed us in this world, for the purposes of his government, and to work out our own happiness, and God hath ready furnished this world for our reception. We are differently placed in it indeed — some in more rich and honourable apartments than others, but

but all are suitably placed, and suitably supplied and employed. We are to use, not abuse, what is set about us. — But what reasonable man will think, that what is thus set about him is his own, when he knows it belongs to the master of the house? Or what reasonable man will set his heart on what he knows is not his own, and what he knows he must leave behind him to-morrow? — An eager affection for the riches and honours, in which the governor of the world thinks fit to place us, whilst we are in this short state of duty, is equally absurd, and the mischief is as great as the absurdity; for an immoderate desire after wealth and honour is very apt to seduce the heart in the application of means for getting at them; and an immoderate love of them, when acquired, blinds the judgment, and perverts the will, in making a right use of them; for such love, as it arises from a fond persuasion that these things are our own, leads us to seek them in our own way, and to apply them, when acquired, for gratifying our own dispositions; — whereas, if we be persuaded, that these appointments belong to God, we are naturally reminded to wait God's method of appointing them, and to apply them to God's purposes; — from a want of this persua-

sion it is that those, who are eagerly desirous and fond of wealth and honour, are apt to abuse both—thus wealth is abused, either by a sordid exclusion of it from all use, or by a vain or a licentious application of it to a bad one, according to men's different dispositions;—and thus honour is abused, by an empty pride, if not an oppressive insolence—a usual attendant on the pride of honour; which, in proportion as it raises men's admiration of themselves, must needs raise in them a proportionable contempt of others.

Nor is this the worst—an eager desire and love of wealth and honour narrows the mind, and spoils our conduct in this life, by spoiling our prospect into the next. It narrows our view within the limits of this world; for, as it is natural to look at what we love, so it is natural to look no farther, and, by thus confining our view within the narrow compass of this world, we learn to confine our designs and actions within the still narrower compass of ourselves—we forget we are beings intended for immortality, and, forgetting that, we drop the surest principle for loving God, and for loving one another. Hence it is, that those, who are eager after riches and honour, have little or nothing to do with religion,
which

which shews them what they are either afraid to look at, or what they have no taste for; for nothing like what they doat on here will be met with in heaven; thus they turn their backs on the prospect which religion gives them into the next life, and so lose the best direction for their conduct in the present.

It is the advantage of Christ's religion, that it enlarges the mind by the promise it gives of immortality; and, by setting our own happiness, not in this life but in another, gives us both leisure and disposition to promote the good of others in the present — for we are never better disposed to assist the welfare of others, than when we have provided for our own; and the good Christian, who has his thoughts in heaven, and has already placed himself where his happiness is to be, is a disinterested person here, and in helping others to the goods of life, feels not those checks of envy and of self-regard, which they feel, who make the goods of life their happiness, and who, consequently, cannot see others advancing in them, without feeling it as a loss and diminution to themselves. The gospel precepts and promises inspire more generosity, and we see how much more open and benevolent the heart of the good Christian

is, than the heart of him who covets wealth, or doats on honour, who cares for nothing but this world, and for nothing in this world but himself.

Our care then, during our pilgrimage through life, must be, so to moderate our affections for what the world affords us, and so to use them, as never to forget that we have no continuing city here, but seek a heavenly one, where our happiness is placed; and that here we are travelling through our duty, with such refreshments to support us under it, as the providence of God thinks fit to allow us, in the conveniencies and innocent pleasures of life; but they are no more than refreshments, they belong only to this state, and we must leave them behind us. If God places us in wealth and honour, we are to remember, that they are a trust, as well as an ornament, and that we are not to set our affections on the splendor and enjoyments they afford, but to set our minds to the duties that belong to them; — for those, who are greatly appointed, shall be greatly accountable — a consideration which should make them humble, and others contented, who, being more meanly appointed, will be less accountable. In all stations of this life we should have a
steady

steady view to the next, and constantly bear in mind the uncertainty of the present, and the certainty of that which is to come — remembering, that to doat and depend on what is transient and uncertain is the greatest folly we can commit — except one, which is, to neglect what is certain and eternal.

The better to cherish such reflections and apply them, let us, in all stations of life, hold fast our religion — which is intended for all stations, however the behaviour of some may look, as if they thought it was intended only for the lowest, and as if the more men have received of God the less they are obliged to honour and obey him.

It is our religion that shews us our inheritance in heaven, which the Son of God hath purchased for us. It is our religion that shews us our way to it, through this pilgrimage of life, by the precepts which the Son of God hath left us, and the assistance with which he is ready to support our sincere endeavours in the observance of them. This religion is a necessary guide and security to us in every station of life, as in every station of life the objects of the world may make us forget where we are going, and lead us to neglect what we should be doing; and, in whatever

stations men are most liable to such forgetfulness and neglect, there religion is the most necessary to remind and quicken them. But so it is — where religion is most necessary, it is most to seek — through men's own fault, in rejecting it, for God hath liberally set it before us all.

Let those then who have religion make good use of it. — Let us not confidently depend upon our own reason, without the assistance of religion, in our pilgrimage through this world to the next, where is our home, where lies our inheritance. We know this world can command our affections — we know our affections can command our reason, and make it submit to what it ought to govern — and, should we follow our affections for the world, in contempt of the guidance which Christ's religion offers us, our boasted reason will fail us at the end of our pilgrimage, when we shall arrive indeed at our home, but shall have lost our inheritance.

S E R M O N XL.

THE ASSISTANCE OF GOD'S SPIRIT IN
OUR DUTY.

ROMANS viii. 26.

The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities.

BY the Spirit here is meant the Holy Spirit;—and surely it is a very material encouragement in the discharge of our duty, under the gospel dispensation, that we have the continual assistance, with which Christ directs and supports our endeavours—and the constant intercession, by which he recommends our imperfect obedience to the acceptance of God.

When Christ finished his life upon the cross, he did not finish the work he had begun for the recovery and salvation of man. But, as, by his death, he paid down a satisfaction for the past offences, with which man stood

stood chargeable, so, after his resurrection, he ascended to the right hand of God, where he sitteth to make intercession for his future behaviour, and from whence he dispenses the grace of his Holy Spirit to direct and assist it. He there sits our high-priest; who “after he
 “had offered one sacrifice for sin, entered
 “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” — So that, “if any
 “man sin, we have an advocate with the Father,
 “Jesus Christ the righteous” — “and he is
 “able to save them to the uttermost, that
 “come unto God by him, seeing he ever
 “liveth to make intercession.”

This circumstance merits our attention; and shews us how valuable the sacrifice is which has been offered on our behalf, and how hazardous it is not to comply with the purposes of it; since Christ himself, who so generously proposed it, is so solicitous that it should not be made ineffectual. It shews likewise his great care over our frailty and imperfection, that he would not leave us to ourselves, to act as gratitude and our own happiness should direct us, without giving us his own immediate guidance to enlighten and support us: and when we had the means before us, in the merit of his sacrifice, by which

we might plead for pardon, whenever we failed in our obedience, yet he thought not that sufficient, but places himself where, after tenderly inviting us to ask pardon of God for our sins, he meets our petitions, and, sanctifying them by his own intercessions, presents them an acceptable offering to the Father.

With respect to us, what greater obligation can we expect, than this, which carries with it so much encouragement as well as authority? Christ has a right to our obedience upon his commanding it, but when he condescends to assist as well as to command it, our disobedience is doubly criminal, as it renounces his authority, and throws contempt upon his assistance.

Did men but pay a due regard to this advantage, which we have in the discharge of our duty, there would not be so many instances of neglecting it; but the truth is, men often reject it, without considering why they reject it: and this arises, not from any defect in the assistance, which discovers itself with all the strength that is consistent with our natures; but it arises from our own vanity and inattention, which leads us to look upon ourselves as absolute masters of our own faculties, and that our resolutions are the mere effect

28 *The Assistance of God's Spirit* Sermon 40.

effect of our own reason, without observing that our reason itself may be under the influence of a superior power. Upon this principle, when we think seriously upon our duty, and resolve to practise it, we call the operation all our own, and, consequently, feel ourselves less concerned at the breach of such resolutions, as we only destroy the works of our own power, and act in opposition only to our own purposes — a fault we easily learn to excuse. — But, when we consider, that every good thought and serious resolution is the dictate of God's Spirit, who is anxious to keep us in our duty, we cannot help feeling a stronger obligation to comply with it, and consequently a sharper remorse in having contradicted it — as every breach of our resolutions carries with it more than a reproach of weakness, in defeating our own purposes, and contains the guilt of rebellion, in fighting against God. A little attention to our own actions, and the incidents which belong to them, will satisfy us of the truth of such interposition, since we have warrant from scripture to expect it. And I may venture to leave the Christian to his faith and his experience to be convinced, that he is under this assistance in the discharge of his duty, and from
thence

thence infer the obligation he is under of obeying it.

But farther, as Christ assists our obedience so he assists our repentance. — Our repentance after transgression is a natural and reasonable duty ; under the advantages of Christ's sacrifice it becomes an useful one ; as 'tis made a sure means of pardon ; and, farther still, by Christ's intercession our imperfect application of these means is made acceptable. — If, after all this, we cannot see a reason for repentance, or, acknowledging it to be reasonable, yet will not shew it — nothing remains, but that we must be lost under the most incorrigible blindness or the most unpardonable obstinacy.

Considering the frequent failures to which the best among us are liable, there cannot be a more interesting contemplation, than this we are now upon. Examine mankind as far as our observation can carry us, and we shall find, that, in spiritual wisdom and behaviour, we are all mere children : we are one day pleased with the proposal of our duty, and the next day disregard it ; — we resolve with eagerness, and soon grow tired of our resolutions. We sin and are frightened, then repent, and ask pardon — again resolve, and again forget.

forget. All men's lives are more or less chequered with this childish mixture. The wisest have their interruptions of folly, and the most foolish, 'tis to be hoped, have their intervals of wisdom. Yet, let not this imperfection of our nature discourage us, since the method which Christ hath taken shews, that he knew it, and has provided against it. The sacrifice, which Christ offered, was, and will be, but once offered to qualify our repentance; but the benefits of it will take place, whenever and as often as we repent. But the intercession of Christ is ever ready to recommend us to God, not once for all, but whenever we apply for it. Why then should our imperfections dishearten us, when we find, that Christ is as indulgent as we are frail? When a sinner looks back with shame and horror upon his sins, 'tis a circumstance which brings comfort to his soul, to consider, that, unworthy as he is, through his own guilt, to approach God for pardon and forgiveness, yet his sincere sorrow for his sins qualifies him for the favour of one who can ask it, and will procure it for him; and 'tis no less matter of encouragement to all in general, that there is this remedy to relieve us, not only under a sense of our greatest transgressions, but also under

under the shame of our weakness in the frequent breach of our good resolutions. Was our happiness to depend upon a single trial, after being once forgiven, who would not despair of finding it? but, when we are allowed so many repetitions of a trial, who will be so careless as to miss it? If such encouragement carries not with it an obligation to be careful, 'tis hard to say whether any power, consistent with that liberty which is the foundation of duty, can make us so.— This it will not be too much to say, that, whatever the power of God may do more in our behalf, his justice—his love—and his wisdom are sufficiently discharged in having done thus much, and if man fails of the happiness, which is thus kindly put within his reach, the guilt, as well as the mischief, of the loss is all his own.

To sum up all that has been offered in a very few words:—Repentance and obedience were a necessary preparation of the heart at the approach of Christ, because he was coming to bring forgiveness of sin, and that forgiveness was to be conferred only upon repentance and obedience;—the same disposition is not less but more suitable among those who have known Christ, as they have known what
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and how great means he hath applied for the atonement of their sins, and are assured that repentance and obedience are the condition, upon which these means must take effect : — Christians are still farther obliged to a better obedience, as the instruction which Christ has left them in his gospel, gives them the plainest rule for what they are to do, and the highest rewards if they perform it. — And lastly, they are obliged to repent and be obedient upon the encouragement which is given them, that Christ will afford them his spiritual assistance to support and direct their endeavours, and constantly intercedes with God to accept their repentance and imperfect obedience.

What then remains, but that we thankfully address ourselves to Christ for these inestimable blessings which he hath conferred upon us : — the nature of our thanks will be best directed by the nature of the blessings we enjoy, and, as this solemn season leads us to commemorate our redemption from sin, the most proper offering we can make to Christ is a pure and contrite heart. When God disposes his blessings among his creatures, the best thanks for them is the best use of them ; for God, whose nature admits of no increase
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of advantage or happiness, employs his almighty power where his infinite goodness leads him to confer benefits, not reap advantage, and that, by such methods as his infinite wisdom thinks proper; — the only return, therefore, that we can make for his goodness, is to comply with the purposes of his wisdom. — When the heavenly host saw with wonder the entrance of the Son of God among mankind, to recover them from sin and disobedience, they sang out his glory with joyful acclamations. — Our gratitude on this great occasion is best expressed by our obedience. A sorrow for sin is our best testimony of joy; and the pure resolutions of the heart the highest acclamations we can raise. Under a serious sense, therefore, of the important benefits which we enjoy by the coming of Christ, and a sober purpose of complying with the design of it, let us close our meditations on this great subject, so full of wonder and so full of love. Let us humbly beseech Almighty God to give us that due sense of this instance of his mercy, ‘ that
‘ our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful,
‘ and that we may shew forth his praise,
‘ not only with our lips, but in our lives
‘ — by giving up ourselves to his service,

‘ and by walking before him, in holiness
 ‘ and righteousness, all our days’ — through
 Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom, with the
 Father and the Holy Ghost, be all ho-
 nour and glory, now and for evermore.
 Amen.

S E R M O N XLI.

CHRIST'S SUFFERING, A REASON FOR OUR
REPENTANCE.

L U K E xxiv. 16.

*It behoved Christ to suffer — that repentance
and remission of sins should be preached in his
name among all nations.*

THE church, with much propriety, has appointed, that, previous to the commemoration of our Saviour's sufferings and death, a season should be appropriated to that sort of devotion, which consists in a recollection of our behaviour, and repentance for our sins; for how can we expect to partake of the effect of that great sacrifice for our sins, if we are not qualified to partake of it? and how are we qualified to partake of it without repentance, when repentance is so

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expressly made the terms and condition which must qualify us for it?

Did not our religion call us to this duty, prudence might suggest the use — of stopping now and then, in the course of our lives, to consider what we are, and what we are doing. We cannot get through the business of life without such consideration; and do we expect to get to heaven without it? Had we only simple follies and indiscretions about us, and our reputation only concerned, as that lies open to the judgment of men, we should think it worth while to recollect and consider them, in order to prevent or remove them;— nay the truth is, we are actually more careful about these, than we are about our sins, though they lay open to the judgment of God, and not only our reputation, but our salvation, is concerned in them.

If we consider how short and how uncertain life is, and how much depends upon our quitting it under God's favour, we must rejoice in every appointment, which calls us to ask for his pardon of our sins; and those, who are little attentive to this duty, and yet hope to be saved, cannot neglect such public appointments for repentance, but upon this hope, that whenever they repent they shall be saved;

saved; which, considering the great uncertainty of life, is no other than a hope, that, whether they ever repent or not, they shall be safe.

As the season of Lent is peculiarly appropriated to devout recollection, contrition, and humiliation of heart, this implies, in common sense, that worldly indulgences should be excluded. For is that heart appropriated to religion, which is thrown open to the indulgences of the world? — An abatement, at least, of these we must admit, though we cannot keep up to the strict example of former times. And if to the article of less worldly indulgences we add more religious exercise, both public and private, and, in the latter, a particular self-examination, sincere repentance, and as sincere resolutions of amendment — if, I say, this be implied and enjoined, it is no more than what common sense will imply in appropriating our time and ourselves to religion; it is no more than what, if rightly performed, will yield us great advantage, and put us in no danger of being suspected as hypocrites — a plea, which some perhaps use, more to cover their own dislike of religious duties, than to protect them from the wrong judgment of others.

The more seriously we attend to these duties, which properly belong to the season, the less inclination shall we feel towards such avocations as are not consistent with them; and the duty of religious reflection, when rightly followed, though it needs not confine us to the closet, will however keep our thoughts at home.

Those, who have to repent of a wicked life, have much to do — and those, who have only to secure and improve a good one, have enough; the former will feel that comfort, and the latter that assistance, from the prospect of Christ's sacrifice before them, and their own preparation of heart to partake of its effects, that they will not regret the absence of worldly entertainments abroad, whilst they feel such solid enjoyments at home, and in their own breasts.

Christ suffered death upon the cross once — and no more; — it was a sacrifice never to be repeated; yet we have the remembrance of it annually set before us; that, as we are too apt to fail in a constant attention to it, we may not be in danger of totally forgetting it; but may have frequent opportunity of applying ourselves to the cross of Christ under the necessary qualification of repentance.

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But what is repentance? is it a cold acknowledgment, that we are sinners, and as cold a remembrance of the sacrifice which Christ once offered for sinners?—This, though it be more than many sinners will be prepared with, is too little for any of us to offer. Repentance of our sins, no one will say, is fully discharged by a bare remembrance of them; and though many may think, and some be persuaded, that it is fully discharged by being sorry for them.—yet this comes not up to it. Repentance is a change of the mind and disposition; and this it is which must qualify us for attending that sacrifice, that is appointed for pardoning our sins; which has no effect, but upon the express terms of our forsaking them, and setting ourselves, with sincere resolutions, for that purpose.

This if we do, we have assurance of an acceptance with God, which, should he call us hence, will introduce us to his favour in the next life, or, if our course of duty here be not yet finished, will be a foundation for comfort in our further discharge of it.—A situation devoutly to be wished, and which, if we sincerely set about it, we shall surely obtain.

There are too many who neglect these stated calls to religious duty, as well as too many who misapply them. A neglect of them arises either from a dissipation of the mind among the pleasures of the world, or from a too close attachment to the business of it. — As to the former case, they are much to be pitied, who suffer the false pleasures of this life to cheat them of true happiness in the next; — and for the latter case, they contradict their own wisdom, who, sensible as they are that no business will succeed without looking to it, omit the proper opportunities of looking to the business of their souls — the most important business of life; but which, it seems, is attended to only when we have nothing else to do. — Too many, likewise, who comply with these stated calls to religious duty, are apt to misapply them, and make the good effect of them as temporary as the occasion. — As there is some difficulty in procuring a religious state of mind, it were prudent, when once we have procured it, to take care and keep it. If we have need of repentance—and who has not?—is that performed, by laying aside our sins — only to take them up again? Or if, in the course of
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the duties belonging to the season, we acquire a relish of piety, and an improvement of sentiments, is it prudent to lay aside what may so easily be retained, to the great advantage of our future conduct? Or, is it not strange misapplication of such duties, to think that, because they belong to the season, the good effect of them should reach no farther? — as if we were allowed to live as we please at other times, provided we live devoutly and soberly in Lent.

This inconsistency in our conduct I had rather ascribe to frailty and inattention, than to a depravity of our nature; — none but the abandoned are fond of vice, and such hardly come within the reach of these stated calls to devotion and recollection; and, as they never feel the good effect arising from them, cannot be said to lay them aside. The far greater number of us (I think I do not misreckon), had rather be good than wicked (though we do not all apply equal care to be so), and, having on these occasions taken up religious sentiments, with pleasure as well as profit, if afterwards we relapse into inconsistent practices, it is not so much because we love vice, but because we forget religion; which, if we be careful to keep about us, will be ready
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at any time, as well as in the time of Lent, to direct and support our conduct; and it is because we are too apt to discharge religion after these occasional services are finished, that we lay exposed to the avocations of the world, or our own passions, and are so ready to follow their invitation.

We should therefore attend to the religious duties of this season, not merely because they are now to be performed, but because they are always to be remembered, and the good effect of them to be carried with us. — The duties of recollection and repentance, though specially called for at this season, are not confined to it, but are always practicable, always useful; — but if once we feel the good effect of these duties on our minds, at whatsoever season we acquire it, it is worth preserving; and it will demand, not so much labour and pains, as common attention, to preserve it.

The preservation of such good dispositions as may arise from the due observance of this season, not only makes us secure, but leads to improvement. This is a point, perhaps, we do not consider as we ought. The procuring pardon for our past sins is a necessary step for proceeding in duty — we have no encouragement.

couragement to proceed without it; — and the laying aside our sins is as necessary a step for undertaking holiness — we cannot serve two masters who make contrary demands. — But, if we take this first necessary step, and go no further — where are we? — We may be, and I hope I may say we are, safe from condemnation; but is there no distance between being safe from punishment and being entitle to reward?

When we consider our situation as Christians — redeemed, by the sacrifice of Christ, from condemnation for our sins, with this view — that we should follow his precepts, under his assistance, to that state of eternal happiness which he hath promised — are we where, as Christians, we should be? — Are we as far as ourselves would wish to be, and as far as Christ intends we should be, by merely repenting of our sins and claiming his pardon? — Christ graciously interposed to save us from condemnation; — but that was not all — it was in order to bring us to happiness; — repentance from sin may procure the one, but it is only the practice and improvement in holiness that will secure the other.

Let us not then mistake, and, by mistaking, misapply the true intent of the season, which

which enjoins our present devotion. — It calls us to repentance of our sins; but that repentance consists, not in a bare sorrow for our sins, much less is it performed by mere external forms, without such sorrow. It requires, besides sincere sorrow for past sins, as sincere resolutions of actual amendment for the future; which resolutions, as they are not to be laid aside with the season, so, if they are afterwards maintained, without a suitable practice attending them, will be of no value.

In short, we shall much misapply this season of Lent, if we use it only in repenting of our past sins, without making it a foundation and introduction to future holiness. God has given us, not only an atonement for our sins, but a talent for holiness, to profit withal till he comes; — think then how our account will stand, if we apply our whole attention to the one, and make no use of the other — and whether we can satisfy ourselves, even now, with the unprofitable reflection (to say no worse of it) that we have kept an even account with our Almighty Judge, and have, every Lent, wiped off by repentance the sins of every year. — Such trim reckoning may suit our worldly, but not our spiritual accounts.

Serm. 41. *a Reason for our Repentance.* 45

counts:—They who, at the return of this season, can find they have fewer sins to repent of this year, than they had the last, find what gives them comfort and encouragement; but they who, year after year, have the same list of sins to repent of, have small reason to boast of their care—in wiping off the old score, only to begin a new one.—This hardly deserves to be called repentance—it certainly is not amendment.

SERMON

S E R M O N XLII.

THE PREJUDICE OF EDUCATION
CONSIDERED.

JOHN xvi. 13.

*When the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide
you into all truth.*

THE general use and design of the Holy Spirit's coming was to give testimony to Christ's character, and to promote his gospel in the world. And his coming on this account seems both natural and necessary. "If I bear witness of myself," says our Saviour in another place, "my witness is not true"—that is, it is not sufficient. What any one says of himself may be true, but, agreeable to human judgment, it is external testimony, beyond what one says of himself, which satisfies others that it is so. The miracles Jesus wrought, it must be owned, were testimonies, and sufficient ones, of the truth

of his mission; yet, in order for their carrying such force, Jesus directed his disciples to look upon them, not merely as his works, but as the works of his Father — they were the Father's testimony in his favour, whilst he was yet on earth; and now the Holy Spirit was to give his testimony of him in like manner, after he had left it; and the miracles, which the Holy Spirit wrought upon the apostles, and which the apostles themselves were enabled, by the Spirit, to work in the name of Christ, as they were a full, so they were a proper external testimony of Christ's character and mission.

Nor was this all: — the miracles which Christ wrought, the miracles which the Holy Spirit wrought upon, and by the hands of, the apostles, were the foundation, the necessary foundation, and yet but the foundation, of that superstructure, which it has ever since been the care and work of the Holy Spirit to build upon. The progress of the gospel through the world, considered under the variety of circumstances attending it, and connected with the extraordinary recommendations which assisted it at its first setting out, is the great and comprehensive argument of its divinity. For the proof of Christianity lies not in

in one, or in some express things only, but in a variety of circumstances, each of which, as they may be considered separately, and usually are so, when men set about raising objections against Christianity, yet ought to be taken together, as the force of the evidence they yield lies, not in a partial, but in an united view of them, and is not the effect of any one but the result of all. It is not miracles alone, or prophecies alone, nor is it this or that circumstance in the progress of the gospel, but all these, with all their circumstances and coincidencies, united together, that is the proper comprehensive proof of Christianity, which establishes its divinity, vindicates the character of its author, and is the general plea by which the Holy Spirit, from the beginning to this time, has pleaded, and through all future ages will continue to plead, the cause of Christ to the world.

Under this general use and design of the Holy Spirit's coming, are contained such particular offices of service and assistance as were necessary for the apostles and first Christians, whose employment it was to preach the gospel. The Holy Spirit was to attend upon them, not only as an *advocate*, to speak for them when they were delivered up to men,

but as a *comforter*, to support them under the hardships of their duty — and farther, as a *teacher*, to instruct them in what belonged to it — for so our Saviour promised them : —

“ I have many things to say unto you ; but
“ ye cannot bear them now — howbeit, when
“ he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will
“ guide you into all truth.”

The law of spiritual righteousness, which Christ came to establish, was to set aside the law of ceremonial righteousness, which Moses had established. But the disciples of Christ, who had been bred up under the law of Moses, were not qualified to be taught this, whilst Christ was yet with them.

It is a very difficult matter to turn out of the mind such opinions as have been, in a manner, born with us, and have grown old with us ; which have impressed a persuasion in us that they are divine, and that it is impious to contradict or disturb them. To tell the Jewish disciples of Christ, that their present religious notions were beggarly elements, and mischievous, in comparison with the excellency of that spiritual knowledge which belonged to Christ's religion, was a lesson, which, if laid too early before them, might have weakened, if not overthrown, their veneration

ration for Jesus ; whose present business with them was rather to convince them, by his miracles, that he was Christ, than to inform them, by his doctrine, of every thing which Christ was to do ; which might have obstructed their conviction, if such doctrine, so very repugnant to their religions notions, had been too hastily imposed upon them.

But if the disciples could not bear such doctrine from our Saviour himself, you may ask, from whom would they bear it when he was gone? — Our Saviour therefore takes care to inform them, that the Holy Spirit, who should guide them into all truth, should “ not
“ speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall
“ hear, that he shall speak — he shall receive
“ of mine and shall shew it unto you.” Our Saviour thus secures their future attention to a lesson, for which they were not at present prepared, by assuring them of the authority with which it would be set before them ; which authority would be no other than the same with which he was then speaking to them ; for the Spirit was to speak to them by instructions from him ;—and yet, adds our Saviour, when I say they will be instructions from me, I mean, that they will be instructions from my Father too — “ for all things
“ that the Father hath are mine, therefore,

“ said I, he shall take of mine, and shew it
“ unto you.”

These prejudices of education, which the disciples of Christ entertained in favour of their ceremonial religion, which Christ was so tender in disturbing whilst he was yet with them, and which were afterwards very hardly removed, yet at last gave way; though no men could have stronger prejudices, or, indeed, better warranted. For the Jewish religion, in its original, was unquestionably of divine authority, and had all along been remarkably patronised by a signal interposition of Providence; and so long as the Jews saw only this, that God had appointed their religion, but did not see, or so much as suspect, *why* he had appointed it, it was natural, it was allowable, for them to be astonished at any proposal for removing it—till they were fully assured, that such removal of their religion was as well authorised as the appointment of it had been; of which they could not be fully assured, till Christ had finished the proofs of his divinity, that is, till after his ascension. For though the miracles which Christ wrought were an indisputable evidence of his commission from God, yet if, only upon the strength of those miracles, he had set him-

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self to overthrow the Jewish religion, he would not have produced stronger evidence for the removal, than had been given for the establishment of it—not so strong—for not only Moses wrought miracles, but God himself had spoke to establish it, and had frequently interposed to support it. The miracles Christ wrought proved indeed his divine commission, but did not set him above Moses; for though Christ wrought greater miracles than Moses did, yet, as the miracles of Moses were great enough to prove his divine commission, and the miracles of Christ proved no more than that he too came from God, they were thus far upon a level; and it was Christ's resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven, which set him above Moses, and gave evident and far superior proofs of his divinity: and when, after Christ had thus finished the proofs of his divinity, he proceeded, by the preaching of his apostles, to abolish the Jewish rites and ceremonies, then, and not till then, did it appear, that the removal of that religion was as well authorised as the establishment of it had been.

When therefore we see Christ not pressing the removal of their religion too early on his Jewish disciples, we must not look upon him

merely as indulging their prejudices, or, as allowing them their present religion merely because they had been bred up in it — but, because it was not yet a time to teach them otherwise; for, as yet, there was evidence behind, and which could not yet be produced, without which it were unreasonable for the disciples to relinquish their old persuasion. Christ therefore with-held such doctrine from them, not merely because they could not, but because they ought not to accept it — and reserved it for another season, not because they would then like it better, but because it would then be highly reasonable to admit it. This was not indulging their prejudices, but taking the surest way for the removal of them — by letting them alone, whilst it was yet unreasonable to part with them, and not calling to have them laid down, till it was become unreasonable to keep them.

Such as would avail themselves of the prejudices of education (and we have many who do—some making them a reason for not quitting bad principles, others for giving up good ones), will find nothing from what has been said to countenance them. Such, for instance, as have been bred up in principles of irreligion, will not be authorized from the example

ple before us for continuing in them. For, though Christ permitted his Jewish disciples to continue in the principles under which they had been bred, yet it was only for a time — and that, not merely because they had been bred under them, but because they had not been shewn, nor was it then fit to shew them, any other. As soon as other and better principles were fit to be shewn them, and were sufficiently shewn them, they were obliged to lay aside their former principles, though they were the principles of their education.

The infidel, therefore, as he cannot at this time of day plead, that other and better principles were never shewn him, besides those of his education, cannot hence be authorised to continue in them, merely because he has been educated in them; but will find, that the example we have been considering points more strongly at a change of his principles than it does at his continuance in them.

On the other hand, such as have been bred up in principles of Christianity will not be authorised from the example before us for giving them up. For though the disciples gave up their principles of education, yet it was not merely because they were principles

of education, but because they had better principles set before them on divine authority; — and when a Christian can find better principles, on divine authority, than those under which he hath been educated; it will then be time enough to make the exchange; but till then it will be both wicked and absurd to make it: — For nothing can be more *wicked* than to reject truth, merely because we have been early blessed with the knowledge of it; nor can any thing be more *absurd*, than to suppose, that whatever is taught us must be wrong, and that, whenever we choose for ourselves, we must choose right.

S E R M O N XLIII.

DUTY TO GOD AS OUR COMMON
PARENT.

EPHESIANS IV. 6.

God—the Father of all.

AS God is the object of religion, much depends upon our having right notions of him: true notions of God lead to true religion; false notions of God lead to superstition, which is both dishonourable to God and detrimental to man; so much, that some have set themselves to examine, whether is worse of the two, Superstition, or Atheism, and have determined, that it is better to have no notion of God, than a false one. But such examination, surely, is both unnecessary and dangerous; it seems unnecessary to examine whether of two things are the worse, where both are naught; and it is dangerous to ad-
judge

judge a preference, though but on comparison, to what ought positively to be rejected, because such preference, misunderstood, may lead to the choice of it. It is enough, to have true notions of God, which if they serve to lead us in the way of true religion, it matters little, whether they who have *false* notions of God, or they who have *none*, are in the worse error — he who is travelling in the right road has no need to examine, who of those that have taken a wrong one are most out of their way.

There is no notion we can form of God that is more true, or which more effectually leads us in the way of true religion, than when we consider him as our Father. Other notions of God may dazzle the understanding, but this enlightens it; and draws the will to the performance of the duty he expects from us.

God is our Father on several considerations.

1. As universal Father of his whole creation, which, as he brought it into being, is, figuratively, generated from him, and consequently suggests the relation of paternity. Nor is it harsh, but elegant, to call God the Father even of inanimate things; scripture warrants the expression. “Hath the rain a father,
“ther,

“ther, or who hath begotten the drops of dew?”

Job xxxviii. 28. Nor does *creation* alone suggest this title of Father — the preservation and government of what he has created, both which belong to paternity, suggest the same, and direct us to call God the Father of the universe, who constantly preserves and governs it. This title of universal Father natural reason teaches us to ascribe to God — the old philosophers used it — and Christians may use it too; — yet, when they use it *to exclude* other reasons of God's paternity, belonging to their religion, they do not pay God that honour they would be thought to do, but ungratefully dishonour him, in slighting the most valuable of his paternal blessings.

2. But besides this universal paternity over all beings animate or inanimate, God is more commonly set forth to us in scripture as Father, in a limited sense, of all rational and intelligent beings—as Father of angels and of men; or, as St. Paul expresses it, “the Father, “of whom the whole family in heaven and “earth is named.” Eph. iii. 15. Natural and irrational things are God's work, God's creatures — of them he is the *maker*, the *creator*, only so; — but of rational intelligent beings, God is not only creator, but, more properly,
Father,

Father; and they his sons—because they more nearly resemble God in their nature—because they are produced and governed in a more noble manner—and because they only are capable of behaving as sons under the duties of praise, gratitude, and obedience;—indeed, inanimate things are said to praise God, but it is only as they afford man an occasion of praising God for their use and benefit.

3. But, thirdly, besides his universal pater-nity over all beings, and his more proper pater-nity over all rational and intelligent beings, God is still more peculiarly Father of Jesus Christ, and, through him, the Father of Christians. God is Father of Jesus Christ in respect both to his divine nature, as he begot him from all eternity in the godhead—and to his human nature, as he sent him to be born in our flesh for our salvation; and Christians have just reason, as well as express command, to call God their Father, who, in that work of our salvation, hath redeemed us, hath adopted us, and hath made us heirs of eternal life.

On these considerations God is our Father:—judge then how false their notions must be, who think of God, and represent him, as a hard master, a vengeful tyrant; nay more, as
a tyrant

a tyrant who not only afflicts his subjects, but creates them on purpose to afflict them. — We will not stay to enquire what sort of religion, if it may be called religion, is likely to arise from such horrid and thorny soil; but, if we take scripture, not fanaticism, for our guide, and are taught from God himself to think of him as a Father, let us reflect a little how well suited that notion is for leading us in the way of true religion.

We cannot surely mistake the lesson, which shews us the knowledge of God and our duty by carrying us to that affection of our nature, which every man so well understands, so sensibly feels. God hath so constituted mankind, that the whole race arises, by generation, from paternity, as from a principle; and the reciprocal affections belonging to it are the root, from whence arise those duties which support society. God might have constituted mankind otherwise; but, intending them for social dependence on each other, he hath constituted them thus; and, to secure the structure, he hath strengthened the foundation (the paternal relation), by throwing into it the strongest, and at the same time the tenderest, affection belonging to the human breast.

— Under

The several duties of human life, when set on this ground, will at once recommend themselves to our approbation ; — and, as the practice of religion is the only true religion, a constant attention to this relation, subsisting between God and us, will keep us in the way of true religion, as it will keep us in the way of a good life.

“ If I be a Father, where is my honour ?”
saith God, by his prophet. But, previous to
divine

divine authority, the obligation to this duty is felt by every human breast, however defective our practice of it may be. Ask any father, and he will give you reasons enough, and good ones, why he should be honoured of his son; and, if he reflects a little, will feel, that those reasons will apply backward as well as forward, and will shew him what he owes to God, as well as what he expects from his son. Ask any son, and he will give you as many, and as good reasons for the affection he expects from his father; which if he receives, those very reasons will apply for his returning honour for affection. — Nor is any father less ready in defining what that honour is, which he expects from his son; that it consists not so much in ceremonies of formal respect (which however are due), as in a love and desire of pleasing him, and a ready obedience to his commands. As, on the other hand, a son is then only convinced of his father's affection, when he feels it in the care he actually applies for his welfare and happiness; — the like practical honour should we yield to God, if we receive the like practical affection from him. — And do we receive less? — whoever considers the common blessings, which God bestows upon mankind, whether natural

or

or religious, will hardly set the greatest parental benefits he either confers or receives in competition with them. Not only our life and being, but the means of sustaining and enjoying it, are the gift of God;—If we honour our earthly parents for administering those means to us, ought we not much more to honour our heavenly Father, who has entrusted them with these means for our welfare and comfort? And when, beyond the conveniences and enjoyments of this transitory life, we look (as we ought intently to look), at the eternal blessings of the next, if we honour our parents for their pious care and endeavours in *qualifying* us for them, much more should we honour God, who has *provided* them for us:—to which general and common blessings, if we add the particular blessings, which we all personally experience in the course of our lives, it is impossible not to see, in God's providence, the conduct of an affectionate father, and, one should think, not to feel in ourselves the disposition of honouring him as affectionate children. — Indeed every one of God's perfections demand honour from us, but honour blended with love, which is the honour due to a father—is a peculiar tribute we pay to his *goodness*:—we honour and
admire

admire his wisdom, we honour and obey his power, but we honour and love his goodness — that parental goodness, which protects our helpless infancy, bears with our wayward youth, and more with our refractory manhood — shews us our duty, assists us to discharge it, warns us of our dangers, encourages us with the good things of life, corrects us with its mischiefs, and promises us eternal happiness in the next life for a willing, though imperfect, obedience in this.

It is in this view the scriptures set the conduct of God before us, which has manifestly every mark of paternal conduct in it, and consequently shews us on what principle we are to place, and by what kind of sentiment we may best maintain, our religion, which is *filial obedience*; — this principle is fastened upon us from our infancy, and introduces us into the world, where the sentiments arising from this principle may be, and too often are, lost in the bustle of life — but it is our interest to preserve them; and, when we are got beyond the reach of earthly parentage, we should apply them in the obedience we owe to our heavenly Father, and in the cultivation of our religion, which is our best guide through

this world, but our only guide into the happiness of the next.

I hope I shall not be thought to disparage my subject, that I thus recommend the sentiments of childhood as the best foundation for our religious conduct; but you will recollect, that, as it is our religious conduct that must lead us to heaven, so our Saviour has assured us we shall not enter there, "unless we become as little children;" — and I am persuaded, that, would we oftener reflect on what we felt, when we were children, and apply it, we should be the better for it. Our reverence for paternal authority was then deeply impressed on our tender minds, not merely to direct our infant actions, but to be legible through life, in every age and path of which we are really under the paternal authority of God; and the more we feel ourselves so, the better shall we behave.—We all remember, what it is to be under a parent's eye, how fearful we were of doing any thing, in their sight, that might offend them, and how happy we felt ourselves, when we did what was pleasing to them—we are still under a parent's eye, every moment of our lives, and it would be a useful guard to our
our

our behaviour never to forget that we are so— to resume the feelings and sentiments of our childhood, and be so much more afraid of offending God, and desirous of pleasing him, as much more, infinitely more, depends on his anger or approbation.

We remember what our love was, which in our state of childhood we felt for our parents, we *then felt* (more accurately than any philosopher can *now define*) that our love, though mixed with fear, yet was not diminished but improved by it. — Could we, but in some degree, feel that love for God, which we once felt for our parents, it would greatly secure and improve our goodness; — we should seek to God by prayer with readiness and with joy — and, by loving God above every thing, as once we loved our parents, nothing would draw us from him, but it would cost us tears, and heighten our impatience to return.

The more we contemplate God's paternal conduct towards us, the more we shall feel a filial disposition towards him; under which disposition the mind has a true notion of religion, and consequently makes a right use of it; for religion, in its true notion, is union with God.—This is what we aim to arrive at by the use of prayer; — and if we do not ar-

rive at this, our prayers are little worth; — and when once we are got to love God as a Father, our union with him is as natural as the relation between father and son. — Yet let me not be misunderstood, as if I was forgetful of our present imperfect state, and recommending such union with God here, as is only to be had hereafter. — Such union with God as consists in a filial love of him, a delight in the contemplation of him and his promises, and a sincere obedience to his will, is perhaps as far as at present we can arrive, and happy they who arrive so far — a more intimate union with God is not our duty in this life, but our reward in the next.

In the mean time such union with God as suits our present state, and is made up of filial love and obedience, is, and nothing else is, true religion; — which, as it arises from having true notions of God, so is upheld and improved by them. The notion of God as our Father must be a true notion, if we may trust scripture and our own common sense and feelings, and this notion, we have seen, leads us to *love, honour, and obey* God.

S E R M O N XLIV.

ON CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

ROMANS vi. 4.

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism, into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, we also should walk in newness of life.

THE subject of this day's devotion is surely the most important, and, we may well add, the most comfortable, that can employ the mind of a Christian. The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of our religion and of our hopes; it is not only the greatest of our Saviour's miracles, but it is the event to which Christ himself appealed for establishing the truth of his mission and the salvation he came to work. — This event then alone confirms, not only the truth of what Christ said, but the effectual success of

what he did. When Christ was hanging on the cross, the Jews tauntingly said — “ If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross, and we will believe; ” — but when Christ rose from the grave, he gave much stronger reason for believing, not only that he was the Son of God, but that the sacrifice he had made of himself upon the cross was accepted of God, and effectual for our salvation.

The resurrection of Christ is the ground on which the apostles built their preaching, and on which we build our faith. St. Paul is express and strong for the eminent importance of this article — “ If,” says he, “ Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.” If Christ be not risen, all that he did before his death is of no amount, and all that he is said to have done after is a fiction. Even his death, on this supposition, avails us nothing; for our hope is built on his having conquered death and reconciled us to God;—death is not conquered by the act of dying, but by the act of rising again; and though God is truly reconciled to us by Christ's death, we can be no otherwise assured of it than by his resurrection.

That

That he might therefore fully establish this important event, Christ continued forty days after his resurrection before he ascended up to heaven. He continued but three days in the grave; which was long enough to convince his disciples he was dead; but he conversed with them, at times, forty days before his ascension, which was not too long for convincing them that he was risen. — As the disciples were to be witnesses of Christ's resurrection, they had, during this time (as it was necessary they should have), the very highest evidence of its truth that could be given — whilst others were left to believe it, as it was fit they should, upon their evidence.

I shall not at present go into this part of the subject; but, leaving the proofs of Christ's resurrection as unexceptionable, and the truth of it as incontestible, shall beg leave to set before you the religious and practical use we ought to draw from it.

As our Saviour was so assiduous to establish the truth and certainty of his resurrection, we ought to be no less ready to admit it, upon this reasonable persuasion, that our faith in it is as much to our comfort, as it is to Christ's honour. Whatever Christ did was not for his own sake, but for ours; he neither died,

nor rose again, for himself, but for us — “ he died for our sins, and rose again for our justification.”

There are two general points, which we are most seriously concerned to manage, if we can — which are, to be good here, and to be happy hereafter. In order to this, as we may want assistance, so the resurrection of Christ supplies us with the best; as that establishes our faith, that he has conquered sin and death — introduced righteousness — and opened to us the gates of heaven, if we believe and obey him.

It may seem strange to say, that Christ, by his resurrection, conquered sin and death, when we still find the power of both so prevalent among us. But it was not the being of sin, which Christ removed, but the effect of it — its consequences; nor was it to save man from dying, but to restore him after death, that Christ died and rose again. Christ conquered the tyranny of the devil, who, having seduced man into sin, would have held him in death, the punishment of it; but Christ, having by his own death satisfied divine justice on the behalf of man, removed that punishment; not excusing, but delivering him from it. Thus death is conquered,

quered, as it is obliged to yield up its prey — thus sin is conquered, being deprived of its sting, or fatal consequence — and thus the devil, having lost the engines of his mischief against us, is defeated of his purpose in ruining us. He may still hurt us, but it is our own fault if he ruins us. We may still sin, but, through what Christ hath done and proposed, we may be saved; and death will still have us, but it cannot hold us. This is truly a conquest over sin and death, though it is not a removal of them; and this conquest, which is wrought by Christ's death, is established and proclaimed by his resurrection — is not compleat without it; for only to die is to submit to death, but to die and rise again is to conquer and triumph over death.

This Christ did — for our sakes — not only for our redemption but for our example. As Christ died and rose again, so shall we.

But St. Paul shews us, how we ought to imitate Christ's death and resurrection even on this side the grave, and points it out, as the only method for enabling us to imitate him in descending into the grave, and in rising from it. — This is by dying unto sin, and rising, or living, unto righteousness; that is, by laying aside our sins, and leading a good life.

life. St. Paul is earnest in this lesson; which he illustrates by the ceremony, used in baptism, of descending into the water, and rising out of it—implying very fitly the profession of laying aside a former course of life, and entering upon a new one. Now, though we are baptised but once in our lives, yet what we are understood to do at our baptism we may have frequent occasion to repeat; though we have but one baptism, we may have frequent occasion for dying to sin—the best of us have sins to lay aside; and frequent lapses call for frequent recoveries. But for those who have lived in an habitual course of sin, they see what they have to do, in order to take comfort from Christ's resurrection; they can no otherwise take comfort from Christ's resurrection, than by endeavouring to make their own like it; and they can no otherwise make their own resurrection like Christ's, than by a resemblance of Christ's death, that, as Christ died for sin, so they must die to sin. We cannot expect to descend into the grave like Christ, that is, without having committed sin; but if, whilst we live, we die to sin, and live to righteousness, we may rise from the grave like Christ, and sit down with him in his kingdom of glory.

I say — if we not only die to sin but live
to

to righteousness — for Christ not only conquered sin by his death, but brought up righteousness by his resurrection; as he has set forth the means and powers of performing that righteousness, which will be acceptable to God, through his own merits, and effectual for our salvation. What that is, the doctrine of his gospel shews us.

And here give me leave to observe — and let us well remember, that we should be very careful, not to satisfy ourselves with a partial performance of our Christian duty. Sin is one thing, and righteousness is another. It is our duty not only to divest ourselves, as much as we can, of the one, but also to invest ourselves, as much as we can, in the other. But we are apt to stop short in this work; and, if we can keep clear of vice (under which title too we comprehend only what is notoriously such), we are little solicitous how we improve our virtue. In consequence of which very common error, many find themselves in this awkward situation — not so bad as to be afraid of hell, and yet not so good as to feel themselves qualified for heaven.

Had Christ only died, and not rose again, he had not wrought our salvation. — St. Paul
vouches

vouches it ;—and if we only die to sin, without living to righteousness, we shall hardly obtain it. It was *much*, when Christ, by his death, conquered the devil, disarmed sin of its sting, and spoiled death of its power ; but it was *more*, when, by his resurrection, he opened the gates of heaven, and shewed us how we might arrive and be admitted into them. The one was his conquest, the other his triumph. And we shall ill requite the pains Christ took in the one, if we be careless to qualify ourselves for attending him in the other.

When Christ hath done thus much for us, reason will tell us we must do something for ourselves ; and there needs not oratory to persuade us to it. Our own interest speaks more distinctly and forcibly on this point than the finest oratory ; — only let us take care to distinguish our true interest ; which lies not in the enjoyment of a day, but in the enjoyment of eternity — not in such pleasures or advantages as belong only to the very short day of the present life, but in the cultivation and improvement of those virtues, which we may carry with us into the eternity of the next ; — and without which eternity will prove a curse.

To conclude. — We cannot, certainly we should

should not, commemorate Christ's resurrection, without thinking on our own; and at the same time thinking, how we may be best qualified to sustain it. — We reflect on Christ's resurrection with wonder — we shall feel our own with something more than wonder; we shall feel ourselves rising, not only to life, but to judgment — to meet him as our Judge who has been our Redeemer—who “died for our sins, and rose again for our justification.” — God forbid! we should then stand before Christ covered with those sins which he died to remove, or destitute of those virtues which he rose to promote in us. — This world, and all its gay contents, will then be — nothing! — no assistance to be derived from thence; but the conscience of such good deeds as we have wisely extracted from our use of it. — Happy they! who make that use of this world; and who, whilst they are yet in it, follow the thought which carries them beyond it; who, whilst they meditate on Christ's resurrection, consider it as a most sure presage of their own. — This consideration, duly cultivated, will fasten this lesson on our minds, and our behaviour (the most important lesson we can learn), to “die to sin, and live to righteousness” here — that, when

when we die to this world, we may live to happiness with Christ in his kingdom for ever.

And grant, O Lord, that as we are baptised into the death of Christ, so, by continually mortifying our corrupt affections, we may be buried with him, and that, through the grave and gate of death, we may pass to our joyful resurrection — for his merits who died and was buried, and rose again for us, thy Son and our Redeemer, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

S E R M O N XLV.

CONDUCT UNDER TEMPTATIONS.

JAMES i. 2.

*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall
into divers temptations.*

BY temptations are meant trials; trials of our constancy in maintaining our Christian duty. These meet us in every path of human life, and are of various kinds. 'Tis true, we meet not with such extraordinary trials as the apostles and first Christians were engaged in, and which St. James had principally in view when he wrote this epistle; we are not put to distresses and sufferings for the profession of a Christian faith; but the more safe we are from such extraordinary trials, which they underwent with constancy and fortitude, the greater care we should take not to be overthrown by such ordinary

ordinary ones as the common course of life throws in our way.

You will readily allow, it is our duty to bear up under trials — but why count it matter of joy to fall into them? Or how does it agree with our daily petition, which Christ has commanded us to make — “lead us not “into temptation.”

The apostle, as I have said, had principally in his view those extraordinary trials by persecution, which belonged to those times; the most effectual support under which was the consideration of the glorious example of suffering, which Christ had set them, and the glorious reward which he had promised them; and as this consideration was necessary for supporting them, so they might well count it, and feel it, a joy, that they were following Christ through sufferings to glory. But, though this was a suitable behaviour under persecution, when they fell into it, it was no reason for seeking it; — nay, our Saviour himself commanded his disciples to avoid it — “When they persecute “you in one city, flee unto another;” — and Christ may well bid us pray not to be led, into what he has commanded us to avoid. The case is the same with respect to the
ordinary

ordinary troubles of life—when they fall in our way, and we behave as we ought under them, we naturally feel a satisfaction in the opportunity we have of doing our duty, and recommending ourselves to the approbation of God; yet this is very consistent with our daily petition for not being led into such trials—just as consistent, as it is for a brave general to feel joy in distinguishing himself in battle, who yet chooses not to seek, and will prudently avoid, unnecessary engagements.

The apostle mentions it, as a good effect of trial, that it promotes that strength of mind, which we call constancy, or patience—“Knowing this,” says he, “that the trial of your faith worketh (or maketh) patience.” There is the same reciprocal connection between the actions and the habits of the mind, as there is between the actions and the habits of the body. Natural strength is requisite for bodily exercise, and bodily exercise promotes strength; courage of mind is requisite for military exploits, and military exploits promote courage; so, constancy or steadiness of mind is requisite for spiritual trials, and spiritual trials promote constancy. The man, who has only walked on the quiet path of uninterrupted duty, who has never

met with any trial, that might either shake or sooth him from his rectitude, may applaud himself for his goodness — but he knows nothing yet of his constancy and patience, whether he is able to withstand great trials, or whether he may not be thrown down by the least that may be set before him. But he who has trod a more rugged path, and has withstood hard trials, knows his own constancy as well as goodness, and, feeling himself stronger for the trials he has subdued, feels courage for meeting (meeting, not seeking) what may hereafter come in his way.

But then, as the apostle goes on with his advice, “let patience (or constancy) have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

Perfect characters, sound in every part, and wanting nothing, may be set forth in apostolic advice, but are hardly to be met with in human conduct; yet are such characters rightly set before us, and it is our duty to endeavour after them, however short we may fall of them. Constancy, or patience, under trials shews her work very imperfect and partial, if we are a match only for small trials, but are subdued by great ones, or if, whilst we bravely withstand some kind of trials, we basely sink under

under others. Her work is perfect and entire, when she supports us under every degree and under every kind of trial. This, it must be owned, is a great work in so weak and fickle a creature as man; and great motives, and great helps, are requisite for bringing it to any tolerable degree of perfection in us: accordingly, God hath set the strongest motives before us, when in the gospel of his Son he bids us look up to his favour, and the reward of eternal happiness in his presence in heaven. If this hope supported the primitive Christians and holy martyrs under their trials, it should be sufficient for supporting us; with the same hope which they had, we should be ashamed not to shew the same constancy, under much less severe trials than they felt. They had, doubtless, besides this great motive for their constancy, great assistance in maintaining it—yet such as all Christians may find if they will apply for it. Constancy of mind under trial depends on wisdom as well as hope; and however we feel encouragement from the prospect of a reward, we must feel ability to proceed rightly towards it: God, who sets us our work, can at all times supply us with abilities to perform it; and that wisdom which is necessary to conduct us under

trial, as it is the gift of God, so will it be given to those who ask it as they ought. So says the apostle in the next verse: — “ If any of
 “ you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who
 “ giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth
 “ not; and it shall be given him.” Of whom should we seek wisdom, but of him, who, as the son of Sirach says, “ created her, saw her,
 “ numbered her, and poured her out on all
 “ his works?” Men differ not more from each other in the natural constitution of the body, than they do in the natural constitution of the mind; some men have more natural courage of mind than others; and the more any man has of this quality, he is so far better fitted for engaging with trials; — but those who have the best courage will find, that wisdom, as well as courage, is necessary on all such occasions; and though, again, some men have more wisdom than others, according as they have stronger faculties and larger experience, yet even those, who have the most wisdom, should not be above asking God for more. The apostle’s advice then is of general use, however he introduces it as if some had no occasion for it; it is advice, which we should all diligently follow; and, when we find ourselves engaged in trials of any kind,
 should

should earnestly pray to God, to supply us with wisdom for behaving under them as we ought to do.

The common events of life are trials to those who are concerned in them, and require wisdom in the management of them. Which, if we ask of God, he hath promised to give us; and it is from a neglect of such application, that we see so many instances, where patience hath not her perfect work. We see some men, after behaving well at the first, under any trial that is set before them, are subdued at last; — the omission of some advantage — some wrong step or other, which wisdom would have prevented, has let in new force upon them, surprized the judgment, and shaken their constancy, and they have fallen, even on the ground they had already gained. Hence it is we see others, who having stood up under some kinds of trials, submit to others; for, as different men have their passions differently disposed, so each man has his peculiar forts and weaknesses, according to the disposition of his passions. One man is invincible under the severest trials of his honesty, who cannot stand the weakest trials of his temperance or chastity; whilst another, whom you cannot

by any force drag over the bounds of temperance or chastity, will nimbly overleap the bounds of honesty. This arises from a want of wisdom in knowing ourselves:—it is a material wisdom to know ourselves, that is, to know not only our strength, but our failings; this will prompt us to guard against the latter, and to keep us steady under one kind of trial as well as another; for we shall acquit ourselves with little honour in our spiritual warfare, if the victory we have gained on one ground be overbalanced by the defeat we have suffered on another.

In these cases of misconduct we are ready enough to allow they proceed from a want of wisdom; but we go no farther: though the next step is open—that such want of wisdom proceeds from a want of religion, in applying to God for it. We think we know ourselves, and how to conduct ourselves through the events of life without God's assistance. But the self-sufficient man, by neglecting all application to God, not only renounces the assistance he might receive from him, but loses those reflections which such application would naturally suggest, and which, if pursued, would set human events in their true light before him, and consequently shew him how
to

to manage or how to bear them with discretion; for it is from seeing them in a wrong light, that we first mistake their nature, and then fall into folly in our management of them. By setting human events in their true light, I mean setting them in that light in which religion shews them, not as ultimate, but as intermediate objects between us and the true ultimate object of a Christian's business. In this light we see beyond them and around them; we see their extent, and judge of their weight—and by this survey of them, which religion gives, wisdom is at hand to go coolly to work in the management of them, undisturbed by the passions; which, as they are ever busiest in proportion to the esteem which our imagination sets on things, naturally becomes quiet in proportion as that esteem is lessened—as it will be, by looking at what reason and religion set before us—namely, the brevity and futility of what is present, and the importance and eternity of what lies in future.

It is from a want of this reflection, which religion best supplies, that some men, with all their self-sufficiency, are oftentimes not a match for the trials that fall in their way. Disdaining to ask wisdom from God for their

conduct under them, they are left to themselves, that is, to their predominant passion, whatever it be; which they are so far from asking help to controul, that they do not feel it ought to be controuled, but pursue it as if it was not *danger* but *duty*. In the disappointment of the predominant passion lies the usual trial of men's conduct; weaker passions leave more room for discretion to work, and common sense ordinarily carries men safe through what they feel to be almost indifferent to them; but wisdom, constancy, and, let me add, religion too, must be called in to our aid, when the predominant passion is to be restrained, or the disappointment of it to be managed and borne with discretion. The man, for instance, whose predominant passion is ambition — if he looks no farther than the present world, will bear nothing in it that crosses his way and obstructs his pursuit: the opposition he meets with inflames his temper, already warmed with desire, and shakes his discretion — he becomes unsteady — he pursues one object from resentment, another from interest, and a third through vanity — stops half way in his pursuit of each — is confounded — listens for applause, and hears reproach — demands regard, and receives offence

fence — is stung — is angry with himself and indignant with the world; and, having acquaintance with no other than the world and himself, of both which he is tired, determines by one rash blow to get rid of both.

To conclude. — The common events we meet with in life are not only parts of God's general government, but particular trials of each man's duty in it. — This we all feel to be true. — Consider, then, who it is that hath set these trials before us, and to what end: — An infinitely wise and good being employs us in the service of his government, to reward us for the discharge of our duty with eternal happiness. If God then, for such purposes, hath placed us in our respective conditions, and set the duties belonging to them before us, what are we to think of him and of ourselves but this — that, as he hath appointed us our duty, he hath also enabled us to perform it (otherwise we lose sight of his being a wise and good Creator) and that, as our abilities are from him, we must look up to him to be supplied with them (otherwise we lose sight of our being dependent creatures)? This reflection shews us ourselves, and the events we meet with, in a true light; and in the course of the latter, in proportion as we feel ourselves concerned

concerned in them, shall feel them as trials of our conduct under some duty or other: under which sense and apprehension of them it is impossible to forget who hath set us such trials, or not to feel joy and encouragement for behaving suitably under them, when we consider who is at hand to help us if we ask it, and how glorious a reward he hath proposed, even eternal happiness, to them who, "by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for honour, glory, and immortality."

S E R M O N XLVI.

ON CHRISTMAS DAY.

JOHN i. 11, 12.

He came unto his own, and his own received him not: — but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

THAT the person here mentioned is Jesus Christ needs no explanation; — what it is that is here said of him will supply us with matter for our present consideration.

1. “He came unto his own” — They were the Jews; who had the first title to Christ, and were the legal heirs of his kingdom. “To them,” as the apostle says, “pertained the adoption, the glory, and the covenants, and the promises; the fathers were of them,

“ them, and of them, as concerning the flesh,
“ Christ came.” Rom. ix. 4.

God had from early ages “ chosen Jacob
“ to himself, and Israel for his own inhe-
“ ritance;” — but not to the utter exclusion
of all mankind besides. Quite otherwise.
The salvation of mankind in general was the
end God had in view, and his taking the
Jewish people to himself was but a means
subservient to that end. They were but an
instrument, by which God prepared that
universal blessing which was to reach over all
the nations of the earth; and which, being
intended to be gradually revealed, was more
suitably first imparted to one particular nation,
and through them to the rest of mankind, than
if it had been revealed to every part immedi-
ately and at once.

There seems therefore to be nothing in this
matter, on account of which the Jewish na-
tion may justly boast a superior merit above
other nations. They may justly boast the
honour of having those oracles of prophecy
committed to them, by which the Messiah
was ushered into the world; but, as in this
they were no more than stewards of those
riches, which God had in store for all man-
kind, they cannot on this account challenge a
superiority

superiority above those, for whose benefit they were entrusted with them. It was a post, which, according to God's purpose in gradually opening this blessing, some particular nation or people, in preference to the rest, must be appointed to fill; and when God thinks fit to make choice of instruments among mankind to serve his purposes, we are told by him who chooses them, that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; — but God hath often chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen." 1 Cor. i. 26.

The patriarch Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, was found good and faithful in the midst of a corrupt generation; and his merit indeed seems to have directed the divine choice in making him the head of that nation, through which he resolved to convey his blessings to mankind. This was the reward of his piety and faith. But what were his descendants? — Excepting some, whom God purposely set up among them as guardians to maintain "the promise he had made to their
" forefathers,

“ forefathers, and to remember his holy covenant, they were a stubborn and faithless generation.”

Yet to this people God gave his promise of the Messiah, and with them he entrusted those oracles which foretold his coming — not to distinguish their merit, but to serve his own purposes — not making them “ his own,” as intending that blessing peculiarly, or even principally, for them, but so making them “ his own,” as appointing them his instruments for propagating that blessing through the world. — Which they did effectually. For

2. “ His own received him not.”

The Jews indeed were for engrossing the blessing of the Messiah to themselves; and yet, through blindness, they rejected him; and, insensible of the rich treasure they had long carried in their bosom, foolishly for themselves, but effectually for God's purposes, threw it among the Gentiles.

I shall not now enquire into this conduct of the Jews, or take notice of the cause which may be assigned for it; but shall rather take occasion to observe from it — that when we condemn the Jews for their obstinacy and ingratitude in rejecting Christ, we should take care that the

the judgment we give against them does not recoil with a heavier stroke upon ourselves. They were not more truly Christ's own, as they were brought up under the promises of his coming, than we are, who have been brought up under the full accomplishment of those promises; nor were the Jews more blameable in rejecting Jesus, whom they did not believe to be the Christ, than we shall be, if we reject him after owning and professing him to be so.—In short, Jewish infidelity is much less blameable than Christian infidelity.

Christian infidelity! a strange expression—but the thing is common. We see it in the conduct of such, who, under the title of Christians, and with all opportunities of Christian knowledge around them, either disown Christ's authority, or live in defiance of it. Jewish infidels were not more obstinate and perverse in ascribing Christ's miracles (the proof of his mission) to Beelzebub, than modern infidels are in ascribing the sacred records of them to knaves and impostors; and, however we may detest the cruelty of those who fastened our Saviour to the cross, yet how many have we among us, who, to

use the apostle's phrase, daily "crucify him afresh by their disobedience!"

What the text then says of the Jews, may with too much justice be applied to us — "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." — His own we are, more eminently than were the Jews; — early baptized and admitted into covenant with him — our younger age carefully trained up to a faith in him, and our maturer years well supplied with means for adding knowledge to our faith. Under these advantages Christ comes to us, not as a stranger of yesterday, as he appeared to the Jews, not to oppose old prejudices as he did theirs; — but he has lived with us from our cradles — has attended our infant steps, and watched our growing youth; and still waits on us, not to contradict, but to confirm and improve, the lessons we have been taught. — And shall we now disclaim his mild authority, and discharge his faithful guidance? shall we, to prove ourselves free, turn rebels to the government we have owned, and, to prove ourselves wise, laugh at the counsels we have received? — This is more than Jewish rebellion, and worse than Jewish obstinacy — who rejected what they despised; but we despise what we have accepted.

Let

Let us "take heed, then, lest in any of" us Christians "there be found a heart of unbelief, "in departing from the commandments of "Christ." This is rejecting him with a high hand. We, who are his own by name, by covenant, and by knowledge, let us receive him not only in faith but with obedience, lest a worse judgment hereafter fall on us, than that which fell on the Jews. That nation was cast out, is still dispersed, but shall be recalled, to accomplish the kingdom they at first opposed. But what hopes of recovery will be left for unfaithful Christians, when, upon pleading their profession, and the name of Christ, at the day of judgment, this dreadful sentence shall be passed upon them — "I "never knew you—depart from me, ye who "work iniquity." — But we will turn our thoughts from the dreadful consequence of rejecting Christ, to look at the blessed consequence of receiving him.

3. "As many as received him, to them "gave he power to become the sons of "God."

1. Christ makes us sons of God by the very act of redeeming us and reconciling us to his favour. The original state of man was a state of favour with God, and, so long as

man preserved his innocence, he might, in consequence of the happiness he enjoyed, and had reason to expect, from God, with great propriety be called his favourite son; but he soon forfeited that favour, and with it fell the character that was built upon it. Christ interposed to save him, and by replacing man in God's favour recalled him to the character of his son. As this was performed by him, who was eminently and truly the Son of God, the act, as it had in it the love, so it brought with it the relation, of brotherhood, and made us sons of God, as it made us brethren to him, who was eminently invested with that character.

2. Besides this, and in consequence of it, Christ makes us sons of God by taking us into covenant with him — a covenant, in which God on his part promises eternal happiness to man, and man on his part engages faith and obedience to Christ. — Thus we become adopted sons of God. — But what (you will ask) could man doubt God's veracity, without a covenant to oblige him? Or, did God want man's obedience, that he enters into covenant with him to secure it? — Neither; — but God is careful for man's obedience, because he is careful for man's happiness; to

secure which, God condescends to lay himself under an obligation, which he needed not, that he might lay the strongest obligation on man to take proper care of his own happiness. This is the care which God expresses for us in our Christian covenant, which, if it be called a fatherly care, we must own it is, not because the merit of it rises no higher, but because our conceptions and expressions can follow it no higher.

3. In virtue of this covenant (the terms of it being faithfully performed by man) God gives him a right to the immortal happiness of heaven, and so places him in the condition and character of a son or heir of his kingdom. This was what man was originally intended to be — this was his natural inheritance as son of God. How it was lost we all know. Adam behaving himself unworthy of the son of God, was made unworthy of the advantages belonging to that character. His sons were born after his transgression, not during his innocence, and therefore came too late to claim an advantage which was only due upon obedience; they came after Adam had squandered away his hopes of immortal happiness, and therefore could have no share in an advantage through him, which he had

not to transmit to them. In this situation mankind had been truly the sons of Adam only, and must all have followed their father's fortune; their relation to their heavenly father was cut off, and, not being heirs of his happiness, they had no foundation for the character of his sons. — But since Christ's reconciliation hath taken place, and we are again admitted into covenant with God, what was lost is again recovered. That inheritance of happiness in heaven, for which Adam and his sons were originally intended, is still kept in reserve for them, and being restored to their right, they are restored to their character of sons of God.

It is true, the sentence of death, which passed upon Adam, still hangs over the heads of his posterity, and we must all go down to the grave — but, it is in our way to heaven. Christ will call us from our retirement in the dust, and take us (if we be found worthy), to the mansions above. In this hope we pass through the short stage of human life, and this hope (by which we cry Abba, Father, and feel ourselves sons of God, and heirs of his kingdom) is wholly built on the reconciliation, the covenant, and the example of Christ, who raised himself from the dead to convince

convince us of his power, and of his intentions, in raising us up after him.

Thus are we sons of God; and thus it is, that they who receive and honour Christ shall be received and honoured by him.—And sensible we must be, that this is not a character of empty honours only; such are no suitable marks of favour from God to his creatures, whose real happiness is the object of his care, as their obedience is the object of his will; and who therefore never confers an honour, but he sends an advantage with it, and expects a duty from it.

As sons of God, therefore, and as heirs of his heavenly promises, let us always remember his honour as well as our own, and what is our duty as well as what is our advantage; that our conduct may be neither unbecoming nor destructive of so noble, so important a character. Let the love God has shewn us, and the inheritance he proposes, continually influence our obedience, that we may appear neither unthankful for the one nor unmindful of the other.—And let us always remember this—God calls us his sons, because he hath shewn himself our father; but it is our part to make ourselves so by obedience;—

God has appointed us his heirs; but it is our own care that must conduct us to his kingdom, where we shall be acknowledged and admitted as such.

SERMON

S E R M O N XLVII.

ON EASTER DAY.

COLOSSIANS iii. 1.

*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things
which are above,*

OUR Saviour's resurrection from the dead is an assurance of our own; nor can we commemorate the former, without thinking of the latter. In this sense then we may well be said to be risen with Christ, since so surely as he is risen, so surely shall we rise. As Christ died to purchase heaven for us, and rose from the dead to assure us of the purchase, so shall we rise to accompany him, if we shall be found worthy, in those blessed regions, where he sitteth at the right hand of God. — If so, the advice in my text connects most naturally and strongly with the assurance it

gives us ; nothing being more plain or more proper, than that, if we be intended for heaven, we should think of heaven — and seek those things which must bring us thither, as well as contemplate what belongs to it.

The hope and assurance of heaven, which we have from Christ's resurrection, should outweigh all the temptations, which the world can set before us, for losing that by sin, which we are sure of obtaining by holiness ; and it has that weight, whenever it is allowed to operate with its full force upon our minds. — But we do not attend to it — we have a clear prospect into a life of glory and happiness ; our faith shews it us ; but we will not look at it ; at least, we will not fix our sight upon it. We believe indeed the promises which Christ hath given us of eternal happiness in heaven, and we sometimes think of them, but we do not set our affections on them ; and, which is worse, we will set them on the enjoyments (as we call them) of the world. It is this which weakens the influence of that hope, which is given us of heaven and happiness, and leads us into a behaviour that is not answerable to it ; for how can our hope after things *above* influence our behaviour, whilst we have a greater value for the

the

the things *below* and about us? It matters not, that the enjoyments of the world bear no comparison with the treasure laid up for us in heaven — there certainly is no comparison between them — but the case is, that where we fix our value, there we make our treasure; and as “where our treasure is, there will our heart be also,” so, where our heart is, there will our behaviour follow.

So long, therefore, as we set our affections on things on the earth, our behaviour will be earthly; and the hope we have of things above, for want of being enlivened with affection, will be too weak to govern us, and, if it saves us from the imputation of being infidels, will hardly entitle us to the character of good Christians; — to obtain which, we must not only hope rightly, but we must live up to what we hope for; and the only way for living up to what we hope for, is, to fix our affections there, where we have placed our hope.

This sermon-beaten topic may be heard indeed without exception, for it cannot be contradicted, but without improvement too, for it is not regarded — by some, who may fancy they do not want admonition on this topic, and by others, who, the more they want

want it, the more they think it tedious. But it is the best consideration that we can apply, for making ourselves easy here, and for putting ourselves in the right way for being happy hereafter.

The apostle, in the same epistle from whence my text is taken, makes use of an expression, which it will be more easy to explain, than to recommend with success. When he advises the Colossians to set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth, he supports his advice on this reason — “for ye are dead,” meaning to this world, “and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

The being dead to this world is a language which those will scarce approve, or indeed understand, who are fond of what they call the enjoyments of the world, but which is well understood and approved by those who seriously consider what they are to be hereafter, and as seriously endeavour to act up to it. To reconcile the former to the expression, harsh as it may seem, they may be told, that being dead to the world means, not so dead as to neglect the duties, which God's providence hath set us in it, or, to refuse the reasonable enjoyments he allows us; but, with keeping a proper attention to the things below,

low, to set our affections only on the things above; mortifying our *corrupt* affections and *inordinate* desires;—which still may seem hard to those, who are fond of indulging them; but which is absolutely required of those, who profess themselves Christians, and expect to be rewarded as such. In this sense we renounced the world at our baptism, and, so far, took our leave of it, as soon as we came into it, by professing that we would not follow nor be led by the inordinate desires belonging to it;—thus, at our baptism, we declared the world dead to us, and consequently ourselves dead to the world—a declaration, indeed, of which too many are as insensible, all their lives long, as they were when it was made for them at their baptism, and which, perhaps, because it was made for them, they may think themselves not concerned to fulfil. But those, who neither forget nor regret that they are Christians, and who endeavour to live up to their baptismal declaration, will feel that to be really true, which the apostle has figuratively expressed; they will feel, that, in proportion as they habituate themselves not to follow vicious enjoyments, they will learn to look upon them as mere dead things; and the temptations they hold forth will have no
more

more effect upon them, than if they were dead; they will then hardly fix their affections, where they feel themselves quite unconcerned, and they will join in the apostle's judgment—that to fix our affections on the world, is as absurd, as if the dead should love what they have left behind them.

The other part of the apostle's expression, which I just now quoted, is, that “our life is hid with Christ in God.”

If we are not to fix our affections on this world because, here we are, or should be, dead to the inordinate desires of it; for the contrary reason we should fix them on heaven, because there we live. The apostle says—“our life is hid with Christ in God.” His meaning is, not only that we have an eternal life reserved and intended for us with Christ hereafter (the nature of which is known only to him and God), but also, that even whilst we are here, our true life, that is our spiritual life, consists in “contemplating him and his promises, in having our conversation in heaven, which is our true country, in copying his example, following his precepts, in loving, honouring, and trusting in him.”—And, because all this may be done without meeting the observation of the world, and ought to be done without

without seeking it, therefore this sort of life is said to be "hid with Christ;" not merely because it often escapes the notice of men, but because it does not escape the notice of Christ, who lays it up, both to be remembered and to be rewarded.

Both these meanings of the apostle's expression carry with them a reason for setting our affections on the things above, and not on things on the earth.

Under a persuasion, that we have an eternal life of happiness laid up and reserved for us hereafter, the present life, in its greatest extent, and with its highest enjoyments, when compared with that, must appear a mere point, a trifle. This is a consideration (there are many such in our Christian duty), which requires, not so much argument for proving the truth of it, or embellishment for shewing the force of it, as attention in the constant use and application of it; from a neglect of which it is, that the objects of the world lay such hold on our minds, and our judgment sets so much value upon them — because we will not look at those objects which have greater; objects, which, however they may appear at a distance, yet are not out of sight, and are oftentimes nearer than we are aware.

— Would

—Would we but apply the ordinary sentiments of life to our religious business, we should act more wisely than we do;—Who would thank a man for giving him an estate to-day, which is to be taken from him to-morrow? but who would purchase such an estate?—nay more, who would run himself in debt to purchase it?—Even the intrinsic worth of any object loses its value for want of duration and continuance;—and can we, at any time, forget the very short duration of this life? or, must we wait (yet that's not long), for that important time to be reminded of it, when we shall be called to die? when we shall sensibly feel, that the objects of the world, which we have so highly valued, wanted, not only duration, but intrinsic worth; under which consideration, and in comparison with the eternal and true happiness of the next life, the short, the very short enjoyments of the present, so far from being fit objects of our affection, will appear, not only a trifle, but as mere nothing;—though, under another consideration, in respect to ourselves, in our use or abuse of them, they will prove, not a trifle, but matters of the utmost importance.

2. To take up the other meaning of the apostle's expression, when he says, “our life
“ is

"is hid in Christ," as implying, that our true, that is, our spiritual, life consists in a contemplation of him, his precepts, and his promises.

Whilst we are walking our span of life here on earth, which, though short as to duration, may be tedious from what we meet with, there is no direction, no consolation like that, which an attention to religion affords; which attention is most effectually spoiled by setting our affections on the objects of this world. Even the reasonable enjoyments of life will grow vapid, if not enlivened with a sense of religion on our minds, which at the same time heightens our relish of them, and keeps us from abusing them; but the evil of life, without religion to help us in the management of it, soon multiplies upon us, and grows intolerable. I say multiplies; because setting our affections upon the objects of the world certainly encreases uneasiness; which can only be removed by listening to religion, when that calls us to withdraw our affections from what gives us uneasiness, and fixes them on what will give us comfort.

How many are more uneasy than they need be, from a want of religious reflection!

Surely,

Surely, when we think of heaven, and see the shortness of life, we might not only bear great evils, but despise little ones; — the truth is, we bear the former, better than we do the latter; the reason is, great evils lead us to religion, whilst little ones attack us when unguarded by it. Hence arise jealousy, peevishness, anger, clamour, and bitterness, which first destroy private, and then go forth to poison public quiet; all which the gentle breath of religion, if admitted, would at once allay; for what are these squabbles of an hour (about trifles) to beings who feel themselves immortal — who know they are here but to-day — who see the solid joys of heaven before them, and are stepping into eternity to-morrow?

Our conversation with Christ, our constant attention to him, to his precepts, and to his promises, as it is the only means for setting us down happy in the next life, so is it the best means for leading us easily through this. The more we fix our affections on the objects of the world, the less able or disposed we are to converse with Christ — the sooner we forget him, and the sooner we lose the guidance of his hand; as, on the other hand, the more we converse with Christ, and habituate ourselves

selves to study his precepts and contemplate his promises, the less relish shall we feel in the trifling and transitory enjoyments of this life, and consequently the less liable shall we be to fix our affections upon them.

To conclude.—Let it be our care, with the view of heaven before us which Christ hath opened, so far to set aside the present world, that it may hurt neither our virtue nor our quiet; let us study to be superior, not only to its *temptations*, but to its *provocations*; — its temptations are deadly, and its provocations, if they do not always lead to vice, always obstruct our improvement in goodness, as well as our quiet: — we may keep ourselves pure from the one, and cool under the other, by a strict attention to religion, by constantly reflecting on the shortness and insignificancy of the things about us, and by constantly endeavouring to imitate the example, which Christ, who is the author, and will be the finisher of our faith, hath set us — in his obedience to God — in his purity of manners — and in his meekness of temper. — If we make this our constant work, God will make it a successful one — by providing us with comfort here and happiness hereafter.

S E R M O N XLVIII.

RELIGION THE TRUE FOUNDATION OF
PEACE OF MIND.

PSALM cxix. 165.

*Great peace have they which love thy law, and
nothing shall offend them.*

THUS says the Psalmist.—Now the law of God, of which the Psalmist must be here understood, was the law of God which he spake by Moses and the Prophets, with the moral law, interwoven with both.

This was the religion, under which the Jews lived; by which they were to form their conduct; and from which they were to expect their happiness. — So that loving the law of God, is loving and following the religion which God hath set before us.

We, to whom God hath spoken by Jesus Christ — we who, besides the knowledge we derive from the law of Moses and the Pro-

phets, together with the moral law (which was the Psalmist's situation), have the salvation of Christ's gospel for our religion — we can set the Psalmist's assertion in my text on a wider foundation and stronger authority, and may well say, "Great peace have they who love the law of God," meaning, who sincerely love and practically follow the salvation of Christ's gospel; — and for those who do so, "nothing shall offend them."

Not that they shall meet with nothing disagreeable, no evil, in their course through human life — that is not to be expected; — but they shall be superior to every thing they meet with of that kind: yet not so superior, as not to feel or not to regard what gives them uneasiness or what gives them pain — that is unnatural and absurd to pretend; but their attention to what their religion suggests and directs will give them internal satisfaction and peace of mind — and that not unattended with external blessings, which will frequently force their way and claim attention; so that, however they may pant under the evils they meet with, nothing shall so offend them as to make them turn aside and leave the paths of virtue, in which the influence of Christ's religion secures them.

Peace

Peace is what all men relish; except the wicked; peace is what all men wish for — but all do not enjoy; — none perhaps enjoy peace free from all interruptions whatever; — which are of various sorts, and of various sizes; as peace itself is of various kinds, the most valuable of all which is peace of mind, arising from religion and a good conscience.

Now our internal peace may be interrupted either by what we do ourselves, or by what others do to us, that is, by sin, or by suffering; — over both of these, our love of God's law, that is, our Christian faith and behaviour, have great influence.

1. As to sin — great peace, indeed, have they (if such there be) whose love of God's law, whose Christian faith and obedience, prevents them from ever falling into sin; whose constant and whose uninterrupted delight is, in sincerely following the precepts, and trusting in the promises of Christ's gospel; and it will be to much higher satisfaction for each of us to try the experiment, than for any of us to draw, or attend to, the highest description that can be given of it. — Nor less peace have they, who, though they have fallen into sin, are not habitually plunged into it, but (by the

grace of God) through a sincere love of him, and his Son, our Mediator, can be recovered from it, by a hearty Christian faith and practical repentance. — In both these cases, great, very great is the peace of those who can avoid, and of those who can get rid of, a guilty conscience.

A guilty conscience! — the severest of all interruptions that can break in upon our peace!

When others break in to interrupt our peace, we may repel their assault, we may bear it; but when ourselves interrupt our own peace, by habitual sin, we find it difficult, either to repel or to bear the insult; — we should find it quite impracticable to remove it, but by the application of that remedy (repentance and faith) which Christ himself hath prescribed, and which Christ himself hath promised shall be successful.

2. As to suffering — that comes either from the hand of God, or not without God's permission (perhaps by his appointment) from the hand of man. As to the former, great peace of mind they needs must have under the sufferance of evil (be it what it may), from his hand whose law they love, and consequently in whose appointments as well as in

whose permissions they most readily acquiesce. The sufferings we may feel of God's appointment easily discover themselves; nor can we be mistaken in ascribing the sufferings we feel from man to God's permission, when we consider his governing wisdom and power over us, which our faith and trust in his perfections do habitually and constantly set before us.

The suffering we may feel from God's hand and appointment we cannot controul, and must submit to; — under the sufferings we may feel from man by God's permission, we are indeed allowed more power both in preventing and in managing them; — with respect to both these points (on which so much depends), we shall find the Psalmist's assertion in my text most amply verified — that they who love God's law, who are influenced and conducted by their Christian religion, have the greatest share of peace and meet with the fewest offences.

Though Providence, for reasons of his government over us, for our exercise and improvement, sends, or permits, some offences among us, yet there are more offences among us of man's making than of God's sending. Most of the offences in human life arise from

the ungoverned appetites and passions of men, which religion best controuls; and they who most love and apply its influence, as they best manage themselves, so are they the best able to manage the offences which others throw before them; and may well meet with greater peace, as they themselves contribute less of their own conduct to make disturbance, and as they check the growth of it from others.

In short, the religious good man is the best friend to himself and to the community he lives in; — he enjoys peace within himself, and spreads peace all around him, that is, his conduct has a natural tendency to promote both. — Thus the gospel of Christ is said to bring peace on earth, from its intention and natural effect, if well received and well followed. It destroys not the real merit of the gospel, that the perverseness and wickedness of men prevent its natural good effect; nor should it discourage the religious good man, that the same cause interrupts the good effect of his conduct, in pursuing his own peace, and securing the peace of others. — Two things he may depend upon securing, which are well worth every thing he may be disappointed of, — the favour of God, and the approbation of his own conscience; which envy or malice cannot

cannot interrupt, and which those who diligently seek them shall eternally possess.

May we all study, and constantly observe, this useful and important lesson of loving the law of God, of loving and practising the religion he has given us by his Son Christ Jesus! — a religion, which if well followed, will set us at peace within ourselves, and the world at peace around us — or, will supply us with strength and comfort to make our way through the disturbances it may throw before us and around us.

cannot maintain that which is not
given to us from God. We are
not to be like the world, and
the world is not to be like us.
We are to be like God, and
God is to be like us. We are
to be like the Father, and the
Father is to be like us. We
are to be like the Son, and the
Son is to be like us. We are
to be like the Spirit, and the
Spirit is to be like us. We
are to be like the Church, and
the Church is to be like us.
We are to be like the world,
and the world is to be like us.
We are to be like the Father,
and the Father is to be like us.
We are to be like the Son,
and the Son is to be like us.
We are to be like the Spirit,
and the Spirit is to be like us.
We are to be like the Church,
and the Church is to be like us.
We are to be like the world,
and the world is to be like us.

Sir, I have the honor to acknowledge
the receipt of your letter of the
10th inst. in relation to the
proposed amendment to the
constitution of the State. I have
the honor to inform you that
the same has been referred to
the committee on the subject,
and they are now engaged in
considering it. I have the honor
to inform you that the committee
have not yet reported thereon.
I have the honor to inform you
that the committee are of the
opinion that the amendment
should be adopted. I have the
honor to inform you that the
committee are of the opinion that
the amendment should be adopted.
I have the honor to inform you
that the committee are of the
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committee are of the opinion that
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S E R M O N XLIX.

FAITH THE PROPER SUPPORT UNDER
TRIALS.

MATTHEW xiv. 30.

*But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was
afraid; and, beginning to sink, he cried, say-
ing, Lord, save me.*

ST. Peter distinguished himself among our Saviour's disciples by a warm and forward disposition — a disposition, which, though sometimes useful, frequently does more harm than good: it produces confidence; which ill suits the imperfection of our best abilities, and, by hiding our weaknesses, betrays us into them.

We need not ask — what it was that put St. Peter on making the extraordinary proposal of his going to Jesus on the water. He could not want proof of Jesus's miraculous power, after having had so much. Nor did he want proof, that what he saw on the water was
really

really Jesus, and not an apparition, after the discovery Jesus made of himself. But the joy that discovery occasioned, succeeding so quick after the affright they had been in, had such effect of transport on Peter, that he asked he knew not what, and he knew not why — only, the sooner he could get up to his blessed master, the sight of whom had so seasonably relieved them, the better; — as to any apprehension of danger, he gave it up, to the conviction and confidence he felt from Jesus's invitation, that he would take care of him. In this Peter was right; but, finding that he did not walk on the very surface of the water, as he expected to do, and the wind blowing hard, he thought he was going to sink, and cried out to Jesus to save him.

Confidence and timidity, though opposite qualities, do sometimes meet together — they met in St. Peter — whose confidence prompted him with the desire of going on the water, where his timidity seized him, and made him cry out for help; which Jesus immediately gave him, and with it this reproof for his timidity — “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” — Not that Jesus, in thus reproving St. Peter's timidity, approves of his conduct in venturing on the water; but he blames his

his mistrust in that power, his confidence in which had prompted him to take this step; which was certainly an unnecessary one, however Jesus indulged him in it, that he might be made sensible of his weakness, which his forward and warm temper would not let him feel.

A zealous and warm temper sets itself unnecessary work, which hath often much mischief or no merit in it. St. Peter would have avoided a great consternation, had he kept in the boat; from whence, previous to Peter's desire, Jesus did not call him; — nor did Jesus commend him for leaving it, or blame the other disciples for not following him.

Our *necessary* duty is sufficient for our attention, and for his approbation who hath set it before us; but when zeal, or vanity, prompts us beyond duty, the work is of our own setting; and we may judge how it will end, by considering what sets us to work; for zeal and vanity must work up to confidence and pride;—so that our Saviour's care of this forward apostle was better shewn by lifting him out of the water when he was beginning to sink, than it would have been, had he carried him smoothly on the surface without any danger; the indulgence of such a miracle in favour of Peter might have exalted him and discouraged

discouraged the other disciples; at the same time that it would have implied our Saviour's approbation of a rash and unnecessary action, had the transaction been so conducted as to shew there was no danger in it.

There is a confidence which becomes us, and which we should cherish in our minds, when (in the *course*, and within the *limits*, of duty), after using our best endeavours, we hope for success and rely on God's providence for it; this is religious confidence in Him; —but when, out of this course, and beyond these limits, we make warm attempts with an assurance of success, this is trusting in ourselves, or trusting too much in God, and we are not to wonder or complain if we do not succeed.

The case is the same, when, from an overweening opinion of our virtue, we put ourselves in the way of vice; either by a neglect of the means, by a use of which we may be guarded against it, or, by seeking opportunities to combat it, that we may shew our prowess in resisting it; which is directly contrary to our Saviour's command, who bids us pray, that “we may not be led into temptation” — a prayer we cannot use with any propriety, when we are purposely seeking temptation.

Our

Our Saviour well knew to whom, to what sort of creatures, he gave this command; and we sensibly feel why he gave it—and that he kindly bids us pray, not to be led into that, which we are so little able to withstand.

But this transaction of St. Peter further shews how it may be with us, in our endeavours to get at Christ, even through a discharge of our *necessary* duty. — His call is encouraging, and we may depend upon his care of us; but we are to remember our own weakness as well as his power, and not expect that our way must needs be on a smooth surface, and that we shall meet with no boisterous wind to affright us. This will suppress our confidence; which neither becomes us nor befriends us.—But then we see too, when danger besets us, to whom we are to call for help, and how ready the arm of Christ is to save us. This will give us encouragement for standing up to duty, and remove our fears of sinking under it.

Christ's reproof of St. Peter shews on what we are to depend in getting at him — “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” Faith in Christ is a necessary, and a sufficient support of duty. We cannot set about duty, if we have not faith in Christ;
nor

nor should we throw up duty, if we have.— Yet there are those who boast in discharging their duty without having any faith in Christ; but it is a duty of their own setting, not of God's appointing; who, as he hath set a law for rational creatures to *walk* by, has also set another, not a contrary, but a necessary law, for sinful creatures to be *saved* by. This law arises from the gracious work of Christ in saving sinful man, and contains his no less gracious commands and promises. Attention to these is duty— which we cannot set about without faith in him who hath set them before us. And this faith, which is necessary for setting about this duty, is sufficient to support us in it, if we cherish and employ it in our hearts by a constant attention to it; — otherwise, if difficulties disturb and affrighten our attention to this faith, so that it loses its vigour, we presently feel ourselves in St. Peter's condition, struggling with the waves and beginning to sink.

Then indeed we may follow St. Peter's example (not in leaving the boat) but in calling to Christ for help in our distress. — 'Tis true, it is our own folly if we run ourselves into unnecessary difficulties; but it is as true, that the loving

loving mercy of Christ is ready with his arm to save us *whenever* we call upon him.

A consideration this, which must greatly heighten our love for Christ, so liable as we are to need his help, on all occasions; but especially then, when we feel ourselves sinking under a sense of our past sins or present difficulties.

It was in the amiable character of helping and saving, that Christ continually shewed himself during his abode among us; "he went about doing good;" and whether he went by land or water, we see, his hand was stretched out to heal and to deliver. And, when he left this earth to take his seat in heaven, he sent down, and still continues, his Holy Spirit among us, to help our infirmities, to succour and support us in our difficulties.

This transaction then of St. Peter suggests to us a comfortable lesson for the support and encouragement of our faith, during our passage through this state of duty and of trial; in which we have much to fear, but, through a Christian faith, we have more to encourage us in meeting it; and where our great and true point of conduct lies in so tempering our fear with our faith, that nei-

ther may destroy, but both may moderate each other.

Fear damps the soul, and faith warms it; and, as we see in the natural world, that vegetation proceeds best with a due mixture of warmth and moisture, so the soul is in best vigour under the united influence of religious fear and religious faith; the former of which should be so exercised, as not to lead us either into superstition on the one hand, or despondency on the other; and the latter, so as not to lead us to presumption. Under which caution we shall ever find it of advantage to cherish in our soul a faith and reliance upon Christ, as a sure means for our being constant and steady in his service, as well as for our feeling comfort and satisfaction in our conduct.

We may well have faith and reliance upon Christ, from what he hath done, and is ever ready to do, for us. Under which consideration, whatever jealousies we may entertain of our own weakness and inconstancy, we should entertain none of Christ's power and goodness. After the very great and numerous tokens he has given of his love and regard for us, it were impious as well as ungrateful to suspect he will desert us if we do not desert him; or, that

that he will suffer us to fall, when we anxiously lay hold of his mercy and truth to save us.

When therefore the false enjoyments of sin give way under us, and we are beginning to sink in the waves of guilt and dismay — we see our remedy — the arm of Christ is ready and able to hold us up — and it is only the arm of Christ that can. Had Peter been alone on the water, with only his own natural strength about him, his consternation would not have saved him; nor will repentance save the sinner, without the arm of Christ, which we must earnestly ask for, as did St. Peter — otherwise we shall deserve to sink; as it may be had for asking, and, if we have faith in Christ, we shall not fail to ask it.

This faith in Christ then we should diligently cherish, if we would be safe; nor should the waves of this troublesome world, its difficulties and trials, affright us, when we reflect, who it was that permitted St. Peter to walk on the water to him: the power which supported him from sinking in the fluid element can support us, ever inclined as we are to sink, first into sin, and thence into destruction — only let us cry out with St.

Peter for Christ's help, and not mistrust his power and will to give it.

St. Peter walked safe on the water so long as he trusted in Christ's power to support him — when he began to mistrust that, he began to sink — his heart sunk first, and then his body; and his courage yielded before the waters.

Surely, with Christ at hand to assist and protect us in the course of our duty, there is nothing that should dishearten us; nor are we in danger, but when we are diffident, and our minds are fixed more upon the wind and the waves, the hardships and hazards that threaten us, than upon the grace and power of Christ, who takes the charge of us. — Yet even then, when our fearfulness, like St. Peter's, makes us ready to sink, Christ's arm will be stretched out to us, if our petition, like St. Peter's, be addressed to him with earnestness and sincerity.

To conclude. — Let us, through the whole course of our duty, and under all dangers and difficulties belonging to it, look up to Christ. — He can and will save us, if we shew ourselves desirous to be saved, by applying those means which he hath appointed for it — faith in himself and in his gospel.

If

If the guilt of sin threatens, like a flood, to overwhelm us, let us with sincere repentance apply ourselves to him, who shed his blood to wash away that guilt. — Yet, let us not depend on the service of our lips, but, let us lay our souls before him, in due humility and contrition; which, stained though they be, nay dyed, in sin, Christ will cleanse, and will accept. He will not despise the faintest essays of the honest soul, that faithfully struggles for more liberty, and will assist it in all its attempts and endeavours to be more free and chearful in his service.

Finally. — If difficulties, or even sufferings, assault and terrify our constancy, let us look up to Christ; who himself underwent the greatest for our sakes; and who will not fail to assist and strengthen those who are following him in that track of duty, and to reward them greatly, in proportion to their greater work.

S E R M O N L.

THE MISERABLE END OF PROFLIGATE
SINNERS*.

PSALM xxxvii. 38, 39.

*Keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing
that is right, for that shall bring a man peace
at the last,*

*As for the transgressors, they shall perish toge-
ther; and the end of the ungodly is, they shall
be rooted out at the last,*

THE prosperity of the wicked cannot indeed escape our observation in human life, and those who think partially on this matter are apt to be disturbed at it, as if it impeached the justice of Providence. Even the Psalmist himself, under a partial reflection upon it, was staggered — “My feet,” says he, “were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped,” *i. e.* I was in doubt, and in danger of disbelieving the care of Providence — “and

* This sermon was occasioned by the conviction of the Perreaus.

“ why ? I was grieved at the wicked, I do
“ also see the ungodly in such prosperity—and
“ I said, Then have I cleansed my heart in vain,
“ and washed my hands in innocency.”

But upon enlarging his observation, and having recourse to his religion, which he calls going into the sanctuary of God, he corrected his thoughts, when he understood the end of these men—“ namely, how thou dost set them
“ in slippery places, and castest them down, and
“ destroyest them ; O ! how suddenly do they
“ consume, perish, and come to a fearful end !”

Our reflection on the prosperity of the wicked is partial, when we consider only their present condition ; and such reflection is not only partial, but dangerous ; as it may not only tempt us to charge God foolishly, as bestowing his blessings where they are not deserved, but may farther tempt us to imitate practices, which, however wicked, we see are so successful. We should consider, not so much what the wicked are at present, as what will be their future condition—what change they *may* meet with, even before they leave this world ; and what punishment *certainly* awaits them in the next. Examples in human life warrant the one part of this deliberation, and God’s express declarations in holy scripture warrant the other.

It

It is certainly not for want of due warning, if at any time men find their wicked practices sinking under them, and themselves falling quick into shame and destruction; if all wicked practices are not thus finished, here in the sight of men (which might be hastening justice faster than is consistent with the nature and design of the present life) yet there are many examples of it, sufficient to warn men against thinking themselves secure in their wicked practices, and therefore should be sufficient to withhold them from being engaged in them.

Such examples frequently employ our common conversation; and it were well, if men would think as well as talk of them, and treat them not merely as matter of news, but as a serious and important lesson; for such they are, to good as well as wicked men, as it prompts good men to set a just value on that integrity, under which they are safe from such misery, and teaches wicked men to suspect their security under such practices as lead to it.

Honest men feel a secret applause, and consequently an encouragement of their conduct, in being safe from the misery which they often see before them, arising from dishonest practices; and if on such occasions they suffer, even under the pity they feel for the guilt of others,

others, will reflect what it must be to suffer under that guilt, was it their own. This reflection serves to fix them in their honesty, and in the prudent resolution of patiently waiting upon God, rather than impatiently throwing themselves into destruction. By "keeping innocency," and "taking heed to the thing that is right," they already experience that peace of mind, which is far more worth than all the *enjoyments* of ill-gotten wealth, but infinitely preferable to the *punishment* of it. And if, in this situation, the honest man should have any occasion to recollect, where he once had his integrity attacked, where "his feet were almost gone, and his steps had well nigh slipped," the joy he now feels for having escaped it, makes him wrap his integrity still closer about him, and fills his mind with a resolution, sufficient to guard him against any attacks for the future.

We often discover an infatuation, attending wicked practices — which every man easily discerns in the conduct of others, but many are so unhappy, as not to suspect in themselves, till they are made sensible of it, not in its operation, but by its consequences.

Generally speaking, every man is endued with natural abilities for a proper discharge of his

his duty in that station in which Providence hath thought fit to place him ; and every man may have, if he pleases, access to the farther assistance of religion, which is ready to warn him of his danger, whenever his passions incline him to go wrong, and, if attended to, will furnish him with strength sufficient to resist them. The first effect the passions work upon men, especially when strengthened by the influence of bad examples, is to rob them of that assistance which religion holds out to them ; by first leading them to neglect, and then teaching them to despise, its *duties* ; after which, in the course of a wicked life, men naturally hate its *remonstrances*, and at last, for their own security, deny its *authority*. But this is not the only effect — for we see, that a course of wicked practices will not only rob men of their religion, but of their common sense too ; for we see those, who have long been ingenious in wickedness, at last prove deficient in the plainest matters — as if wickedness had overstrained the wit in its service, and crippled it for common use. — Certain it is, that religion, honesty, and a good understanding, mutually assist and strengthen each other ; so that, when a man has thrown up his religion and his honesty, it is not wonderful if his understanding,

standing, when bereft of its best support, fails him too.

Nor is it any other than a natural operation, that those, who have long studied to deceive others, should at last deceive themselves; for their former success, if it improves their cunning, heightens their confidence too, so that, by flattering themselves with their own abilities, they overlook what is plain, or depend upon what is weak, and thus, at last, fall into a discovery.

There is a vulgar saying (which, however, has too much truth in it to be despised) that the devil drops or forsakes men on such occasions; — having held them up in their wicked practices, till he has secured them his own, he lets them fall into discovery and destruction.—It is very true (for scripture tells us so), that “every man, when he is tempted, “is drawn aside by *his own lusts*.” — No man is wicked, but he has, within and from himself, both the motive and the will to be so; yet this hinders not but that our spiritual enemy, the devil, may be aiding and assisting to both. We know not, indeed, *how* evil spirits work, but that they are busy about us, we are warranted to say; — they work not wickedness *in* us, without our own invitation,
nor

nor can they work mischief *about* us, but under God's permission; yet, by their powers and situation among us, they may administer occasion and assistance to the wicked purposes of men, and what they can administer, they can withdraw, and, as their whole design in helping us is to ruin us, their work proceeds in its natural order, when, after assisting men to be wicked, they expose them to their fate.

If wickedness did not blind the understanding, men would see (and detest when they see) under whose assistance, and to serve whose purposes, they are acting, when they are studying and practising the tricks of dishonesty—when, with much ingenuity and success, they hang one fraud upon another, till *that* chain breaks with its own weight, and a chain succeeds, which fetters them to death.

And, if wickedness did not blind the understanding, men would see (and be reclaimed when they see) for what anxiety, for what shame and anguish, which meet them in dishonest practices, they relinquish the peace and pleasure which attend the paths of honesty. Anxiety wicked men must feel, conscientious shame and anguish of mind, long before they meet public shame and the anguish of a prison. No man who is a rogue at heart, and
busy

busy in his practice, goes quietly to bed, sleeps sweetly there, or rises thence with comfort.— However he may (as indeed he must) rise with all his wits about him—he rises too with all his fears about him.—All men must die! yet—*how*—is another and a material question. The good man, who rises from his bed to the honest business of the day, knows (nor is affrighted at the knowledge) that his next sleep may be in the grave; yet, with this thought about him, he can nevertheless set himself cheerfully to his business, can succeed, and be happy in it.—Not so the rogue—who, though he be hardened in wickedness, has never yet (let him deny it if he can), so hardened himself against reflections, as not to feel them, however he may be too hard to be mended by them;—they affright him, he shuns them; they pursue him, he goes to bed with them, dreams of them, and rises with them. An honest man may think of the *grave*, but a rogue is ever thinking of the *gallows*: with the view of that constantly before him, he forces an appearance of gaiety, yet is inwardly miserable—he is surfeited with wicked purposes, yet he cannot discharge himself of them—he feels the devil's tyranny over him, and

and is equally afraid to obey or disobey his commands; — thus *he* proceeds to *his* work, not with alacrity, but in despair — as if the deeper he plunges the safer he will be.

It is not what may be thus *painted*, but what men *feel*, that does the good; and real examples, which daily abound, when seriously considered, teach more effectually than description. Yet, 'tis a melancholy truth, that such real examples of misery, arising from dishonest practices, abound more and more among us, as if such examples, instead of discouraging men from the like dishonesty, encouraged them to imitate it. Among the lowest class of the people, many, who are spectators at one public execution, are sufferers at the next; and, higher up in life, many who read and discuss the case of others, and their miserable condition, lay down the news-paper, and go to commit the same crimes. This shews a hardness and strength of wickedness, of which it were easier to point out the cause than the remedy: but such instances, though too many, are, I hope, fewer than the instances of those, who are the better for seeing in others what may be the end of their own wickedness, and that there is no security in dishonest practices. They may hold up for a while, and they may

ascribe

*

ascribe it to their own cunning that they do so, but they had better esteem it, what it truly is, the forbearance of God; yet, whatever be their course, whether longer or shorter, or however supported, their end will not be peace; — even if they are allowed to die in their beds, they will feel little satisfaction from having escaped the punishments of this world, when they look back on their past life, and see (what they cannot escape) the punishments of the next world open before them.

When men are become abandoned and hardened in their wicked practices, no serious consideration is likely to lay hold of them; but, till they are so, there are many which may be set before them, each of which are so strong, that it were needless to say which is strongest. One I will mention, which is, that when men suffer death for a crime committed against the laws of their country, they must be judged at God's tribunal for more guilt than they die for — not only for the crime itself, but for its consequences, which, in proportion as they bring misery on others, lay additional guilt to the criminal's account. It may be said, when men have thrown away all regard for themselves, they are not likely to feel any regard for their families; — yet, that

that man must be hardened indeed (and that hardness must itself be the very greatest of crimes) who at his last hour does not feel *guilt*, as well as *anguish*, in the thought that he leaves his innocent family overwhelmed in a misery, which he has thrown upon them. Under this distracting thought of their misery here, added to his own, of where he is going, at what rate would he gladly purchase back those hours, whilst he was yet free from his crime, or but just engaged in it! Let those then, who now enjoy such hours, learn hence, how to value their condition, and be very careful to preserve it.

How different is the end of the honest man! who, under the influence of religion and integrity, has gone through the duties of his station with a good conscience, and now finishes his course with reputation, and without fear. The integrity which he held fast through life comforts him in death, and, as he stands on the brink of eternity, he can look backward or forward without dismay; — he looks back on a quiet and useful life, and forwards to a happy one. He has *enjoyed* what he is leaving, which he willingly relinquishes for far greater enjoyment where he is going — and — (what closes his eyes in peace), he leaves his family

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happy behind him — to follow him in those blessings of Providence, which he has enjoyed, till they follow him to those immortal blessings, which he sees before him, and to which he is now ready to take his flight.

God grant we may all, not only *wish*, but *study*, to “die the death of the HONEST MAN, “and that our last end may be like his!”

SERMON

S E R M O N L I.

THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST.

JOHN i. 14.

*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt
among us.*

THE incarnation of the Son of God for the salvation of man, is the subject of the present season. A greater or more useful subject cannot employ our thoughts. If we consider the event itself, it excites our admiration; if we consider the end, to which it was directed, it should excite both our admiration and our gratitude. And though there be more in this subject than we can comprehend, yet there is enough intelligible for rational and pious use; so much as, when considered with an honest and sober heart, will make us wise unto salvation, though not so wise as God.

In bringing about the recovery of fallen man, the great matter lay in the conflict (if we may be allowed to call it so), between the divine justice and the divine mercy. — Mercy pleaded for pardon, justice required satisfaction. If justice alone had taken place, we had been lost; if mercy alone had taken place, the honour and authority of God had been debased. The point then was, since neither of these attributes were to be exercised so as to exclude the other, how they might be exercised, so as to leave room for each other — how to make divine mercy and divine justice meet together, and to find a method, in which God might at the same time express his mercy to sinners, and vindicate his own honour and authority.

And is it not a suggestion of common sense and common modesty, that nothing but divine wisdom can find a method, by which divine mercy and divine justice can co-operate in such a work? and when such method is found and appointed by divine wisdom, is it at all wonderful, that human wisdom cannot comprehend what it could not discover? or, is it a reason for rejecting such method, that we cannot comprehend all that belongs to it?

Nothing

Nothing surely is plainer, than that sinners themselves could have neither power to find or dignity to propose such a method. We may well venture to say, that no created being could have such power and dignity. If God be offended, none but God can propose the terms, on which he will be reconciled. The offenders themselves cannot propose any. For though this may be done between man and man, where there is an equality of nature, yet it cannot take place between God and man, where there is no such equality.—Man indeed may, naturally and reasonably, apply himself to some method which he may wish, may hope, might be successful in working his reconciliation with God; but he cannot apply himself to any method, which he can be assured will be successful, but to such only as God himself thinks fit to appoint. Superior beings, though not concerned in man's offence, cannot propose any terms, because, though they are superior to man, they are yet at an infinite distance inferior to God, and to make them proposing terms between the offence of man and the justice of God, and reconciling the opposite demands of divine mercy and divine justice, is making finite creatures judges of what

is infinite, and absurdly places an umpire over the supreme.

If then none but God can interpose to save fallen man, it must be a material point to be assured, that he who did interpose to save him was God ; and being assured of that, we have the highest reason to be satisfied of the efficacy of what he did. Since here is a person undertakes to make reparation for the offended majesty of God, who is of the same dignity and power with him against whom the offence is committed ; in consequence of which, the honour which is rendered to God by his obedience is proportionable to the dishonour which God received by man's disobedience. For every instance of offence is the greater, in proportion to the dignity of him against whom it is committed ; man's offence, therefore, against God must be, on that account, the greatest. Again, every instance of honour is the greater, in proportion to the dignity of him who yields it ; therefore the honour yielded to God by Christ is, on that account, the greatest. So that when Christ the Son of God proposes to make satisfaction to God for man's offence, there is the greatest honour proposed, in reparation of the greatest dishonour ; and, as he who

who interposes for our reconciliation is of the same dignity and power, because he is of the same nature, with him whom we have offended, we feel that assurance in the efficacy of what he hath done, which we could not feel, but from his interposition alone.

Our whole duty of faith and obedience to Christ is built upon the act of his redeeming us from the guilt and punishment of sin; and the whole merit and efficacy of that act is built upon this circumstance, that being God he became man to redeem us; it was this circumstance which made his interposition in our favour satisfactory. This circumstance then highly merits our attention; and, since so much is built upon our Redeemer's being God, it greatly behoves us to believe and be assured that he was so.

Some venture to deny this important truth; others, without expressly denying it, endeavour to represent it as an indifferent matter, whether we believe it or not; and would persuade both themselves and others, that 'so long as they believe Jesus Christ to have been a teacher sent from God, to shew mankind their duty, and are careful to do as he teaches, no more is required of them.'—Those, whose Christianity reaches no farther

than this, deserve not the appellation of Christians; whilst they think but carelessly, or not at all, of the divinity of Jesus Christ, they cannot think properly of the redemption he has wrought, which is entirely built upon it.

Though the setting aside Christ's divinity is much to be suspected as a step towards setting aside his precepts, yet these men do not distinguish themselves so much by their immorality as by their vanity and turbulent self-conceit, which sets them against established opinions, however sound, and leads them to attack the fences of our established religion.—Consistently enough—for, the divinity of Christ set aside, we shall be much at a loss for the divinity of the religion he has set us; without which there will be hardly reason for its establishment. The Christian religion is built entirely on the satisfaction Christ wrought for us; and that satisfaction stands entirely on his being God—for no created being could work it.

A prophet may be sent to teach, and his doctrine, if supported on divine testimony, is truly divine doctrine; but this is a part only, and an inferior part, of the religion we have from Christ, who came not only to *teach* us, but to *die* for us, and thereby to make satisfaction

satisfaction to divine justice for the sins of mankind; and it is our faith in this work of Christ, that is properly Christian religion, and which denominates us Christians; and, as it is the divinity of him, who wrought this satisfaction, that is the support of our faith in it, so it is that which eminently stamps divinity on our religion.

Was Christ really no more than a teacher, these men would make no scruple to reduce him to the still lower character of a field-preacher; — quite consistently — for it is every whit as reasonable, and as practicable, to deprive Christ of his divine commission, as to deprive him of his godhead.

But those who consider Christ only as a prophet and teacher sent from God, do not sincerely act up even to that persuasion, when they refuse him his divinity; for if they think themselves obliged to do as Jesus Christ teaches, they must think themselves obliged to believe what Jesus Christ has declared, as well as to do what he has commanded. Supposing it to be true, that Jesus Christ is really God, it cannot be an indifferent matter, whether we believe he is so or not—any more than, supposing it to be true, that he is a teacher sent from God, it is an indifferent matter whether

whether we do as he teaches or not; — and if these men can find enough in the scriptures for believing that Jesus Christ is a teacher sent from God, and for that reason think themselves obliged to practise his commands, they may, if they please, find enough there too for believing that he is truly God — and will be self-condemned, if they think themselves at liberty whether they believe it or not.

This is what I propose to shew, by collecting some of those passages in scripture, which are material for proving the divinity of Christ; and which I shall lay before you in as plain and intelligible a manner as I can.

I have taken my text from St. John's gospel, a main part of the design in writing which seems to have been to assert the divinity of Jesus Christ. There were some, even then, who denied this point; and, other evangelists having already recorded his human genealogy, St. John thought it proper to record his divine original.

He therefore, at his setting out, calls our Saviour neither Jesus, nor Christ; the former being the name given him at his circumcision, the latter the title belonging to his office, which he exercised thirty years after; neither
of

of which, therefore, could with strict propriety be applied to him before he was born of the virgin. The evangelist therefore, laying aside such titles as belonged to our Saviour *after* he was made man, takes up a name, which belonged to him *before* he was made so — the Word.

This name was well known both to Jews and Greeks. It was well known to the Jews — for it was a custom with them, in their synagogues, to have the Hebrew scripture read with an interpretation in the Chaldee language, which was the language in common use among them, the learned only understanding the antient Hebrew. This Chaldee interpretation being in common use, we may well presume contained the common received notions of the Jews. Now this interpretation frequently uses the title of *the Word of God*, for God himself, especially in relation to his creating the world; so that the Jews, being thus constantly taught, that *the Word of God* signified *God*, and that the *Word of God* made all things, would readily understand the Evangelist, when he said “In the beginning was the Word.” — The Greeks too had the same name in use, and the same meaning for it; and its being so well known
I and

and understood, seems to account for the Evangelist's speaking of so great a mystery in so brief a manner.

The Evangelist asserts five things of him, whom he calls the Word, — 1. That he "was" in the beginning. 2. That he was in the beginning "with God." 3. That he was "God." 4. That he "created all things." 5. That he was "made flesh, and dwelt among us." Now there can be no doubt, but that, by him who "was made flesh, and dwelt among us," the Evangelist means Jesus Christ; and as little room is there to doubt, but that he, of whom the Evangelist asserts, that he was "made flesh," is the same, of whom he asserts that he was "in the beginning" — that he was "with God" — and that he was "God." — All these assertions, therefore, laid together, are a manifest declaration of the divinity of Jesus Christ.

This declaration is agreeable to what may be collected from other passages in scripture, and which, when laid together, plainly prove these two important points.

1. That he, who was conceived and born of the virgin Mary, and by name and title was Jesus Christ, had a being before

he

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he was conceived and born of the virgin Mary.

2. That the being, which he had, was that one eternal being, by which he always was truly and properly God.

The scripture proofs of these important points shall be set before you the next opportunity.

SERMON

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S E R M O N LII.

The same Subject continued.

JOHN i. 14.

*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt
among us.*

AT the conclusion of my last discourse I left these two important points to be considered :

1. That he, who was conceived and born of the virgin Mary, and by name and title was Jesus Christ, had a being, before he was conceived and born of the virgin Mary.

2. That the being, which he had, was that one eternal being, by which he always was truly and properly God. — I am now to set before you the scripture proofs of these important points.

1. John.

1. John Baptist gives this testimony of Jesus Christ — “ This is he of whom I spake ; He
 “ that cometh after me is preferred before
 “ me ; for he was before me.” John 1. 15.
 It is well known that John Baptist was conceived of Elizabeth before Jesus was conceived of the virgin Mary ; that he was born before him, and that he entered upon his office before him. John Baptist therefore, in saying that Jesus “ cometh after him,” assumes to himself a priority of time before the conception, birth, and office of Jesus Christ, which cannot be denied him. But though in these words he assumes a priority of time, yet, in the next words, he yields to Jesus Christ a priority of dignity, when he says, “ he is preferred before me.” What immediately follows is introduced as the reason why he yields this priority of dignity to Jesus Christ — “ for he was before me ; ” — which words, therefore, cannot imply a priority of *dignity*, for that is the very point which the Baptist had already just asserted, and which these words are introduced to prove ; and can we think the Baptist meant to prove his point by repeating it ? These words then must imply a priority of *time*, and must mean that Jesus
 Christ,

Christ; who appeared in the world after John Baptist, yet had a being before him.

2. Our Saviour gives this testimony of himself—"Before Abraham was, I am"—*i. e.* "I was," had a being, or existed, before Abraham. It is plain the Jews, to whom our Saviour was speaking, understood him so, by the reply they made to him.—The expression—"I am" for "I was," may seem unusual, but it occurs in other places of scripture, and has a singular propriety, as it means, not only existence, but continued, eternal, existence. When Moses asked God for his name, God said—Tell the children of Israel, "I am, hath sent me unto you," *i. e.* the eternal being hath sent me. So the Psalmist—"Before the mountains were brought forth, or the earth and the world were formed, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art."—This is the true translation; to which ours has added the exposition, "God from everlasting."—Nothing, you see, can be more parallel—"Before the mountains were brought forth, Thou art"—"Before Abraham was, I am."

3. Our Saviour says to his disciples—"What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before?"—Our

Saviour says also, "I came down from heaven
"to do the will of him who sent me."

These expressions imply, that our Saviour had been in heaven before the time of his speaking in this manner. Either, therefore, our Saviour had been in heaven before he was born of the virgin, or he had ascended up thither, between the time of his birth, and the time of his saying this. But is the latter at all likely? — Our Saviour ascended up into heaven after his resurrection, but is it likely he had privately ascended thither any time between his birth and that public ascension? — To what purpose? What evidence is there of it? — It appears then, from our Saviour's own testimony, that he not only had a being before Abraham, but also that he had a being in heaven.

Let us now look at such passages in scripture as shew, that the being, which Jesus Christ had before he was born among us in the flesh, was that one eternal being by which he always was truly and properly God.

1. St. Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews, says, "God, who in times past spake unto
"the fathers by the prophets, hath in these
"last days spoken unto us by his Son" —
there

there is no doubt, but by his Son is here meant Jesus Christ; — it follows in the very next words — “whom he hath appointed heir of all things; by whom also he made the worlds;” — which must necessarily be meant of Jesus Christ, as well as what goes before. — Here then is an express declaration of St. Paul, that “Jesus Christ is he, by whom God made the worlds.”

Nothing can be a more concise proof of the divinity of Christ than his creating the world. Our reason will satisfy us, that the world cannot be made by any created being, and, as there are no intermediate orders between God and created beings, this forces us to conclude, that the maker of the world must be God — a conclusion fully confirmed by scripture, which expressly asserts, that “he who built all things is God;” and when the same scripture as expressly ascribes the work of creation to Jesus Christ, it must follow undeniably that Jesus Christ is God.

2. St. Paul says of Jesus Christ, that “being in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form

“ of a servant, being made in the likeness of
“ men.”

By Christ's taking upon him the form of a servant is meant his subsisting in human nature; consequently, by his being in the form of God, which is here described as a prior condition of Christ, must be meant his subsisting in the divine nature. Now the apostle's argument for humility, which he is here pursuing from the example of Christ, will have no weight, if Christ did not really subsist in human nature; but if he did, and the apostle means to express such real subsistence when he says, that “ he took on him the form
“ of a servant” (or man), then it will follow, that when he says, “ he was in the form of
“ God,” he means by that to express his real subsistence in the divine nature; the use of the same phrase in both propositions implies, that the same thing is meant in both. So that we have this assertion from the apostle — that Jesus Christ, who, in his former state, was really God, in his state of humiliation became as really man. And, lest we should drop short of a proper notion of Christ's divinity, the apostle expressly says, that he was so in the form of God, as to be
“ equal

“equal with God.”—But—“to whom will
“ye *equal* me, saith the Holy One?”—nothing
but having the divine nature itself can make an
equality with God.—He therefore that did
truly think himself equal with God, must be
understood to subsist in that one eternal inde-
pendent nature of God.

3. In the prophecy of *Isaiah*, God thus
describes his own being — “I am the First
“and I am the Last, and beside me there is no
“God.” In the Revelations of *St. John*,
Christ describes his being exactly in the same
terms — “I am Alpha and Omega, the First
“and the Last.”

Christ comforteth *St. John* with the majesty
of this title — “Fear not, I am the First and
“the Last.” — He upholdeth the church of
Smyrna by the same description — “These
“things saith the First and the Last, which
“was dead and is alive.” He ascertaineth
his coming to judgment with the same decla-
ration — “I am Alpha and Omega, the First
“and the Last.” — What shall we say then? —
In all these places the same title, the same de-
scription is attributed to Christ, without any
limitation, in the same eminence of expression,
in which it is attributed to the supreme God.
— We conclude then, justly, that, as Christ

hath thus solemnly and frequently taken the very same style to himself, by which the Supreme Being expresses his Godhead, so he hath thereby declared himself to be the supreme, almighty, and eternal God; and consequently, that the being, which he had before he was born of the virgin Mary, was the being, by which he was truly and properly God.

More texts of scripture might be produced — but ye do not need them; — yet there is one obvious argument for the divinity of Christ, which I may remind you of — a plain and conclusive one. There is not a clearer proposition belonging to religion in general, than, That God is the only object to be worshipped; nor a clearer proposition under the Christian religion, than, That “all men” should honour the Son even as they honour “the Father;” — lay then these two propositions together, That none but God is to be worshipped — and, That Jesus Christ is to be worshipped — and who sees not the conclusion? — That Jesus Christ is God.

We are not to wonder, much less ought we to object, if on this sublime point, and others that are connected with it, our notions cannot follow the declarations of scripture;
and

and that we are called upon to believe more than we can comprehend. We, who make it no wonder, that men in the lowest class of life have no notion of what belongs to the courts of princes, should not wonder if man has no notion of what belongs to the Godhead; nor do we scruple to believe there is a God, though we have no notion of *what* he is. We have no notion of *spirit*, we have no notion of *eternity*, yet we believe what scripture tells us, that God is an eternal spirit. We believe we consist of soul and body, yet how little can we comprehend of the structure and preservation even of the body, but how totally ignorant is the wisest of the nature of the soul, and how it is connected with the body?—why then should any wonder or object to the connection of the Godhead with human nature, merely because he cannot comprehend it?

We are in haste to form notions of whatever we hear, and, not having materials for forming true notions on this subject, which lay in a higher state, we go to work with such materials as lay about us, and which belong to this state.

Thus, when scripture expresses a distinction of Father and Son in one and the same Godhead, we have no other notions of Father

and Son, than what we have from human nature; which however will not serve us for forming a true notion of this relation in the Godhead — for this obvious reason — because divine nature and human nature are not the same. God the Son is declared to be *begotten* of God the Father; upon which we immediately apply the notions we have of a human father and son — we can apply no other; — but these will by no means suit. For in human nature the father must exist before the son; but in the divine nature the son is as eternal as the father. In human nature every son is truly another man; — Abraham is man, and Isaac is man, but Abraham is one man and Isaac is another man. It is not so in the divine nature; the Father is God, and the Son is God, but the Father is not one God and the Son another God, but the Father and the Son are, both, the same God. So, likewise, we have no other notion of communication but from one to another; but the eternal Godhead is not so communicated — how it is communicated it is impossible we should know; yet this communication it is, which constitutes the distinction of Father and Son in the Godhead, and which, at the same time that it makes the Son equal to the Father (for it is the Godhead that is communicated to

to the Son) makes the Father greater than the Son; for the Father hath the Godhead in himself, and not by communication as hath the Son.

We cannot comprehend this — and the applying our human notions to the divine nature, leads us into difficulties in our thoughts, and those difficulties make us peevish and arrogant; whereas, would we take Christ's word for what he has said, without attempting to form notions upon it, of which we are not capable, and which therefore Christ doth not expect from us, we should be both wiser and easier. But we cannot get over the unreasonableness, as we term it, of being called upon to believe what we cannot comprehend; and though we do this every day with each other, yet when God sets it before us, on points relating to his divine nature and wisdom, we are angry, as if God held from us, what we had a right to have explained, when the reason why it is not explained to us is, because we are not, as yet, capable of comprehending it.

It is dangerous when we arrogate so much to our own understanding; that we will not admit what even God does or says, which exceeds our comprehension. This throws us
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at once off the duty of faith—which, however, whether we will admit it or not, is a duty which God always has required, and always will require of us in this state. Now it would destroy this duty at once, to have every thing fully explained to man's understanding, could that be done; — for what becomes of faith, where there is comprehension and knowledge?

Our duty of faith, as God hath placed us, with his scriptures before us, employs us not only in looking back to what is past, but also in looking forward at what is to come; and if we will not believe God's declarations of what he has done, in sending God his Son in human nature among us to redeem us, because we do not comprehend how it was done, we must, on the same account, not believe that the same Son of God will come again in human nature to judge us — the latter, I presume, being as incomprehensible to man's understanding as the former — but God forbid we should wait for the latter, before we will be convinced of the former.

No! rather let us attend to God's declarations in holy scripture, and, though our notions cannot, let our faith follow them. This surely is a reasonable duty, which we

owe

owe to the God of truth, to believe his word, as it is the firmest basis of our salvation, to rely on the divinity of Christ who wrought it. Let us not depend on our virtues, whatever they be, for the favour of God, whilst we still stand accountable to his justice for our sins; which, whilst they teach us humility, shew us the true nature of our salvation through Christ, who, being God, took on him human nature, dwelt among us, and died for us. — He came, not merely to *teach* rational creatures, which a philosopher might do, but to *atone for* and *save* sinful creatures, which even a prophet could not do. — None can *forgive* sins but God alone, and none but God can *atone* for them.

[illegible]

S E R M O N LIII.

REPENTANCE NECESSARY UPON THE
COMING OF CHRIST.

MATTHEW iii. 2.

*Repent ye ; for the kingdom of heaven is, at
hand.*

THUS preached John the Baptist, to those, who were bid to expect Christ's coming — and thus preached Christ himself, at the opening of his ministry, after he was come.

The design of Christ's coming among us, in human nature, was, to procure pardon for the sins of mankind ; — therefore they who were bid to expect Christ's coming, were very suitably bid to prepare themselves for it by repentance, because the pardon it brought with it was to be granted only upon their repentance.

For

For the same reason, they who have known and believe in Christ, are obliged to shew repentance and obedience; because they are made acquainted with the means, which have been applied for procuring their pardon with God, and know that repentance and obedience are the necessary condition, on which those means must take effect. The nature too of those means calls for this duty; whether we consider the voluntary love, with which they were proposed, or the dignity of the person who offered them, or the method by which they were applied; and further, because the means thus applied, and for this purpose, are the only means which ever will be applied.

To all which we may add another topic of consideration, on which this duty recommends itself to our attention; and that is, the instruction Christ hath left us by his preaching. Such was his care for our salvation, that he not only paid down a satisfaction for our past sins, but he hath given us the plainest directions for our future conduct.—The recovery of mankind had indeed been imperfect, if both these points had not been provided for. Pardon for past disobedience had been of little use, without knowing how to perform future obedience;

obedience; and to have been put in a method of future obedience would have signified as little, without discharging the guilt of former transgressions. — As the matter now stands, our recovery is compleat, and our repentance and obedience become necessary upon the highest reasons.

For, if unavoidable ignorance be a reasonable excuse for transgression, a full knowledge must be a no less reasonable obligation to obedience. Now Christ, by his preaching, has fully explained our rule of duty; in consequence of which explanation we have the means of fully knowing our duty, and therefore should shew a suitable behaviour—I say, in consequence of our having the means of knowledge before us — for though we must first actually know what is our duty, before we can do it, yet if the want of that knowledge arises from our own neglect, we are as justly accountable for it, as if we really had it; and the actions, which flow from such a want of knowledge, stand in the same degree of guilt, as those which arise in direct opposition to it; for he is equally culpable, who is ignorant of what he might know, as he who acts contrary to what he does know; the laying before us a plain lesson of our duty, carries with it an obligation

obligation both to know and to apply it ; and he who would excuse his want of application from such want of knowledge, is guilty of the same absurdity, as he who would excuse himself in one fault, because he has been guilty of another. — Yet with many it is a favourite maxim, That God requires no better obedience from his creatures, than what is proportionable to their knowledge ; — this is true, when rightly understood, but quite otherwise, when abused. God expects no more from us than what we know to be his will ; but he expects we should know that to be his will, which he has sufficiently declared to us as such ; — so that, 'tis not what we *do* know, but what we *might* know, which is the true rule of our obedience. When once men are persuaded, that their present real knowledge of their duty is the sufficient measure of their practice, it is an easy, and a common method to shorten the labour of the latter by reducing the extent of the former ; which may effectually be done by pursuing a contrary course, for vice naturally wipes out the lessons of virtue. — And shall it then be admitted as a reasonable excuse for a vicious profligate, that he knows no better ? — or, can we suppose, that God has laid

us down a lesson of our duty, and that he will at last dispense with our observance of it — because we have not read, or have forgot it? — The means, therefore, of full knowledge, with which Christ has furnished us, carry with them an obligation for a suitable behaviour on our parts, and; if we are fully taught our duty, we should endeavour to act up to it, or abide the consequence if we do not.

Before the coming of Christ, that rule of life, which results from the very nature of man, as a reasonable creature, was the law of his duty — a law, which, considered merely as a law, was plain and perfect; but, considered as influencing the condition and temper of man, who was to see and be directed by it, was chargeable with obscurity and imperfection in its effect, arising, not from the nature of the law, but from the nature of the subject, to whom it was directed. The corrupt dispositions of mankind had so blinded their reason, that they did not truly see what it contained, and had thrown such prejudices before them, that they were for thinking every thing reasonable, which they had a mind to do. So that the natural law of morality, though pure in itself, lay blended with a heap of corrupt additions, nor could the

ablest philosopher separate the one from the other.

It is true, some among them did make great advances in this work; but they were very few; and what they did was, on many accounts, too imperfect to be called a complete rule of duty for mankind. For, 1st, They were absolutely ignorant of one very material point, which was, how to obtain pardon for past transgressions; without which the best lessons they could give for future obedience would not answer the purpose which was wanted; for how were mankind the nearer their happiness by future obedience, so long as they still stood condemned for past transgressions? It is true, they might see, that repentance was a suitable behaviour after transgression, but they could not prove that it was a sufficient atonement for it.—2^{dly}, What they could see, and did prescribe, was neither sufficiently clear, nor sufficiently authorized, to be an effectual and convincing law to mankind; who were not likely to follow, implicitly, what they found themselves capable of disputing, and which too they had a right to dispute, as it was founded on such judgment only and authority as was like their own.—As to any system of natural religion, which
may

may now be laid down, it is not right to infer from what we know at present of natural religion, that it was, or might have been, the result of mere reason, without any help from revelation.—We certainly reason better upon natural religion than the heathen philosophers did, and it is owing to the help, which revelation gives us, that we do so—why else should not they reason as well as we? The rational capacity of man is as good in one age as another; but the assistants, under which it works, may be different; and to that must be owing the difference in its effects.

When Christ came and preached, he gave mankind the genuine precepts of morality, free from the corruptions and obscurity, which heathenism had thrown over them. He laid the foundation of his religion in giving mankind a true notion of God, and a true knowledge of themselves; and, by teaching them that they were sinners, and that God was just but merciful, he laid those principles of love and fear, which are the only security of a suitable behaviour to God. He taught them the method of obtaining pardon for their past transgressions; and, by shewing them what God had done and was disposed to do for

them, gave them the best reason, as well as the plainest directions, for discharging those duties which their interest told them they owed themselves; and, lastly, he laid the surest foundation for the practice of social virtue, in those short, but plain, directions for our behaviour towards each other, by which we are taught to love our neighbour as ourselves. — All this Christ plainly taught; and when, at the same time, he sufficiently convinced his hearers, by his miracles, that he was a teacher sent from God, what he plainly taught became as strongly in force; and we, who have sufficient evidence to convince us, that the gospel contains the records of what he taught, have thereby a plainer rule of duty than mankind had before, and consequently, on that account, a stronger obligation to observe it.

Another part of the instruction which Christ gave mankind by his preaching was, that he enforced the observance of that rule of duty which he laid down, by more fully opening the reward of our obedience.

The reward he has proposed is immortal happiness in the kingdom of heaven; and the same miraculous testimony which proved that the doctrines he taught came from God,

and are therefore to be observed, prove likewise, that the promises he gave came from God, and are therefore to be believed. What greater reward, or what greater assurance of obtaining it, can we expect? But did the law of nature, or the law of Moses, propose this reward, and give such assurance for expecting it? 'Tis plain they did not;—and, for any thing which may be alledged to shew, that the happiness of a future state was what the heathen might discover by the strength of human reason, and the Jew might expect from their revelations as well as from their reason, this I think may be said, without any fear of contradiction — that, admitting the heathen discoveries, and the Jewish expectations, upon this point, to be as great as their warmest advocates would represent them, they were not so great, nor so well supported, as their expectation, who read and who believe the gospel; —nor will it hurt the pretensions of the gospel, that the rewards which it proposes were in some degree discoverable before—'tis sufficient if it gives mankind a fuller explanation of them, supported upon a better authority.

We see then a farther reason for obedience under the advantage which the instruction of Christ brought with it—since, besides the

plainest explanation of *what we are to do*, it gives us the fullest assurance of *what we are to expect*. That this is a reason for obedience cannot be doubted; for, as the mere knowledge of our duty carries with it an obligation to comply with it, in consequence of our being rational creatures, so, as we are sensible beings, the offer of a benefit carries with it an obligation to deserve it; and therefore, when, besides the rule, a reward of action is proposed, there arises a double obligation for obedience, an obligation to do what we *know to be right*, and an obligation to do what we *believe will be advantageous* to us. Since then Christ by his preaching has so fully explained our rule of duty, and so fully proposed the highest rewards for our obedience, what remains on our part, but to act up to a rule so clearly adapted to our knowledge, and to accept a proposal so fully adapted to our interest?

S E R M O N LIV,

LIFE CONSISTETH NOT IN
ABUNDANCE.

LUKE xii. 15.

*A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of
the things which he possesseth.*

THERE is an error among mankind, which is old matter of complaint, and which, I doubt, will never be removed: it is, that we look for happiness in the wrong place, and expect to find it from things without us, when, if it is to be had at all, it must be found within us. Nor is there any thing without us, on which we so confidently fix our expectation of happiness, as abundance: this is what most men covet, few enjoy, and no man wants—to make him happy.

Happiness is a word of ambiguous meaning; and, according as we understand it, it is

either no where or every where to be found. If we mean happiness in an absolute and perfect sense, we must not look for it here below; but if we mean such happiness as suits our present life, we may not only look for it, but we may find it, and that too without abundance: for this we have his word, who is the author and preserver of our being; who has placed us in this life; and in whose hand are the materials necessary for making us as happy as this life will admit: He himself, by the mouth of his Son, hath told us, that “a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”

This is true in every meaning of the word *life*. — If we understand it in its lowest meaning, as it signifies barely sustaining life, this certainly does not require abundance: we all know, that simple nature asks but little, and is satisfied with it; though we most of us feel, that when simple nature is vitiated by artificial appetites, it not only requires abundance, but is unsatisfied with it.

But life is hardly life without enjoyment; — take it therefore in a higher sense; and by life let us mean enjoying life; — this too does not require abundance.

Providence

Providence has wisely distinguished mankind into a variety of conditions; but then he has graciously distributed the enjoyments of life among them with as great variety: happiness indeed is to be found in no condition; God has tempered the highest enjoyments of life with an alloy of uneasiness, that we should not mistake our business here, and, finding happiness on earth, forget to look for it in heaven.

God appoints no man his station in human life as his reward, but as his work; nor does he call men to affluent stations to make them happy, but to make them useful. We are all, from the highest to the lowest, fellow-labourers in the service of God; happiness, what is truly such, is to be the wages of our labour, which, as it is not due till the work is done, so will then be paid according to the merit of our work, not according to the value of the materials with which we wrought.

But though happiness is not to be expected in human life, yet we may meet enjoyments in it; and these are not peculiarly appropriated to abundance, or to the affluent stations among us,

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As to the enjoyments of the sensual appetites, they depend on the structure of the human frame, and are alike in all stations: the rich man quenches not his thirst, nor satisfies his hunger, with more enjoyment than his poor neighbour does; it is true, the former indulges those appetites more than the latter, but whether such indulgence heightens or abates the enjoyment, let those determine who have tried it.

But say that abundance furnishes out higher enjoyments than those of the mere sensual appetite; let the affluent man boast, as Solomon once did, and tell us — “ I make me
“ great works; I build me houses; I plant
“ me vineyards, and plant trees in them of
“ all kinds of fruits; I make me pools of
“ water; I get me servants; also I have great
“ possessions of great and small cattle; I gather me silver and gold, the treasure of
“ kings and of the provinces; I get me men-
“ fingers and women-fingers, and musical
“ instruments of all sorts.” Eccl. ii. 4—8.
Very well! Solomon once had all this; and, which is more, with all this he tells us his
“ wisdom still remained with them:” But did Solomon find true enjoyment in this abundance
of

of the things which he possessed? Hear his own account of the matter. Whilst these fine things were fresh and new about him, he exults, and says, "I was great, and encreased
" more than all that were before me; and
" whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not
" from them; I withheld not my heart from
" any joy, for my heart rejoiced in all my
" labour."—Solomon, you see, was as happy as any man of a large estate and fine taste could be. But after some use and trial of this happiness, we find his gay exultations sinking into sober reflections, and he tells us—"Then
" I looked on all the works that my hands
" had wrought, and on the labour that I
" had laboured to do; and, behold, all was
" vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was
" no profit under the sun." Whence this change? How comes it, that what was happiness last year is vexation this, and what so lately was wisdom is vanity now? The objects, on which Solomon had placed this happiness, were still before him, and, doubtless, like other men of wealth and taste, he was making improvements every day: How comes it then, that, whilst such objects are daily improving, the happiness expected from them, instead of improving, daily diminishes? Is not
this

this a sufficient proof that such is not true happiness? True happiness is not the worse for wearing: what was once so will be always so, and will never degenerate into vexation; nor will true wisdom ever degenerate into vanity; but what is found vanity at last was never wisdom at first.

The whole nature and substance of that happiness, which Solomon derived from the objects he had about him, is accurately put down in the single question he asks — “What good is there to the owners thereof, save the beholding them with their eyes?” But the eye is not the seat of true happiness; for “the eye is not satisfied with seeing;” and happiness can never be where satisfaction is not. But that the eye is tired with seeing, and that the pleasure arising from it grows weak and palled, Solomon sensibly felt; and those who have not Solomon’s wisdom feel it too. The happiness (if we will call it so) arising from elegant and splendid possessions depends not on the objects themselves, for then it would continue with the objects—but on the novelty of them, as appears by our feeling such happiness decreasing as the novelty ceases; after which we are obliged to seek another principle to set this happiness upon, and, when we

we no longer feel any pleasure from beholding with our own eyes what lies around us, are forced to take up with the pleasure which we feel from others beholding it with theirs: a pleasure, which how it can administer true happiness is wonderful, being, as it is, the effect of pride in ourselves, and the cause of envy in others.

And yet, except such pleasure arising either from our own or others eyes in looking at what we possess, we shall be at a loss in finding a superior share of true enjoyment in an affluent state: for if, in proportion to the higher pleasures it affords; it loads us too with heavier cares, where is the superior share of *neat* enjoyment at the foot of the account? Care and enjoyment walk hand in hand through every path of human life; and a little observation will satisfy us, that, as this is a general circumstance belonging to our human condition, so, in particular instances, care is ever proportionate to the enjoyment we meet with: the great feel a heavier weight of care to balance against their superior pleasures; whilst those who taste inferior pleasures feel also inferior cares to corrode and to disturb them.

An affluent station can no otherwise procure true enjoyment of life than as it is well applied;

ed; and with the same management any station may procure the same. In every station, be it more or less abundant, we feel duties to perform and appetites to govern; whoever does this, though in a low station, gains the true point of human wisdom, and feels that enjoyment of life which both suits and satisfies his taste — the highest feel no more: so that, upon a fair view of the matter, the advantage seems far from lying on the side of the affluent man, who, after a discharge of greater duties, and the government of stronger appetites, gains no more than what the less affluent man may gain through a discharge of easier duties, and the government of weaker appetites.

The mind is the seat of true enjoyment; if less affluent stations yield enough to make that easy, the most affluent can yield no more; they may yield less, and, in aiming to get at them, we hazard the enjoyment which we cannot improve.

A conscientious discharge of the duties belonging to our station, directed by a sense and practice of religion, and, in consequence of that, supported by a government of appetite, yields enough to make the mind easy; and, as this is a sure means for the enjoyment of life,

so

so it may be applied in the inferior stations of it. Sensual ease and enjoyment is out of the question; that, in excess, is not the life of a man, in moderation it is the privilege of all men; for the former indeed we must go to abundance, that only administers excess; the latter the elements administer to all alike. But the ease and enjoyment of the mind each man must administer to himself, and is therefore put within the reach of every man; it is the peculiar privilege of no station, but is attainable in all; and as it may be found in the lower, we are not necessarily obliged to seek it in the higher, where it is not found without great search, not kept without the greatest management.

When therefore we take a general survey of human life, and view the several conditions into which it is distributed, we must not fix our choice on the affluent conditions as the seats of happiness, for that is no where to be found below; nor need we fix our choice upon them as the peculiar means for the reasonable enjoyment of life, for that is every where to be found. Let us not be wanting to ourselves, and all outward abundance will be unnecessary; but without this prime sufficiency it will all be too little.

The whole secret of enjoying life lies in the government of our appetites: with this, we may make the lowest station of life easy; without it, the highest will make us uneasy, and only splendidly miserable. They are our *wants* which make us uneasy; and these spring not all from the same cause; some are laid upon us by the hand of Providence, others we bring upon ourselves. They are, both, inconsistent with the true enjoyment of life; and therefore the fewer we have of either, the truer enjoyment we feel; but the one it may often be our unavoidable portion to bear, the other it is always our duty to prevent; and when we look seriously and strictly among mankind, we shall see, that, though those sort of wants, which Providence lays us under, may make us sufferers, yet they are those we bring upon ourselves which make us miserable: the wants which Providence thinks fit to lay us under, as they proceed from his wisdom, are directed to our good; the wants we bring upon ourselves, as they proceed from our folly, tend directly to our misery.

A regular government of appetite guards us against both these sorts of wants; it enables to bear those wants which Providence lays us under,

under, and to prevent those which we are apt to bring upon ourselves.

It enables us to bear those wants which Providence lays us under, as it shortens our desires and lays us open to the influence of religion. We may shorten our desires till we teach them to move even within the common necessities of life; and whoever can make himself easy within that sphere will have little to suffer from the wants which God ordinarily lays upon men; for though God throws many down from luxury, he does not ordinarily throw them out of bread; and those only perish with a little, who have not beforehand learned to live upon a little. Thus a regular government of appetite, by shortening our desires, adapts us to the wants which Providence may think fit to lay us under, and so far enables us to bear them; but it still farther enables us to bear them, as it lays us open to the influence of religion. It is the irregular indulgence of appetite that makes us averse to religion; and therefore a due government of it naturally inclines us to religion: when our lusts and passions are silent, the still voice of God may be heard; and when once we become attentive to God's commands, we soon submit with cheerfulness to his appointments.

And, as a regular government of appetite thus enables us to bear the natural wants which Providence may lay us under, so it enables us to prevent those artificial ones, which we are apt to bring upon ourselves; these, as they arise wholly from the irregular indulgence of appetite, will be prevented by a controul of it; these, as it is always our duty, so it is always in our power, to prevent, though it may not always be in our power, after long indulgence, to restrain them. In the management of these artificial wants lies the great art and secret of living comfortably; and the management is, to have as few of them as possible. This is true abundance, not *much wealth*, but *few wants*; and the true enjoyment of life lies, not in the abundance of what we possess, be it ever so much, but, in a proper use of it, be it ever so little.

S E R M O N LV.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

MATTHEW xiii. 45, 46.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

OUR Saviour in his parables uses the expression of "the kingdom of heaven" with some variety. Sometimes he applies it to signify that kingdom of happiness in heaven, which he hath prepared for us. Sometimes he uses it to signify the means he hath appointed for our obtaining it — the religion he hath set forth in his gospel. — Instead of confining the expression to either of these meanings separately taken, we may very well extend it to both; we then take in at once the excellency both of the end we aim at, and of

the means which lead to it; and we have this general lesson from the parable—that the business of religion is best worth our care, as it conducts us to that happiness in another life, which is infinitely preferable to any advantages belonging to the present.—A lesson, which we do not so much need to be taught as to be reminded of.

What can this world afford us?—This is a question, which few ask themselves with a view to the true answer. Thousands ask it with a desire of making all they can of this world, but few ask it with a view of enquiring how little that all amounts to.

What can religion afford us?—This too is a question, which men are apt to put as improperly as the former, and therefore furnish themselves with as improper an answer to it. They ask it, not with a view to find out the good it yields them, but to exclaim against the hinderances it throws in their way.

Yet these questions are the ground, on which a proper behaviour must be built; and therefore much depends upon asking them right. For if we have so high an opinion of this world as to think it can afford us all we want, or so low an opinion of religion as to think it can afford us nothing but what we dislike,

dislike, we are grossly mistaken, and open to any temptation that may meet us ; but if we can look upon this world as containing, at best, but present conveniences, and esteem religion as our sure guide to true happiness, our judgment is right, and our behaviour will be so too. — And need there much reflection to conduct us to this judgment, or to direct us in the practical application of it ?

Look into the world — St. John tells us, in a few words, what we find in it, and what becomes of it : “ All that is in the world, “ the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, “ and the pride of life, is not of the Father, “ but of the world — and the world passeth “ away, and the lusts thereof.” 1 John ii. 16.

If what this world sets before us was of solid worth, yet the small portion of time allowed us for the enjoyment of it is a circumstance, that should forbid us fixing our affections upon it. The continuance of any good is a leading point in estimating its real worth, and the best enjoyments become trifles by being transitory. Threescore and ten years may appear long, when compared with the present moment, or when compared with the present day, but what are they when compared with eternity ? Short-sighted as we

are, we can stretch our view to the extremity of this life, and, however loth we may be to expect another, we cannot avoid being convinced there will be an end of this. But, short as the whole extent of human life is, the enjoyments it affords are shorter. How late do we arrive at them? — how imperfectly do we feel the best of them? — and how long do many outlive the relish of them?

This is a general circumstance annexed to every worldly enjoyment. Should we examine them particularly, we should find, that, besides this general circumstance to abate their real worth, each has its particular discouragement to diminish our imaginary value for it.

What is even the serious business of life? — the only thing that bids fair for the approbation of a rational creature. There is so much fatigue and uncertainty mixed with it, that the pleasure or the advantage arising in the pursuit of it is far from deserving the name of happiness. Trial is the very design of our present state; and he who makes the smoothest way through the business of life, finds enough to try every virtue, and every qualification he possesses. He can no other way get on with success, but by feeling, and
subduing

subduing opposition. Moral difficulties will perplex him, and he must deny himself pleasures, for which he has an appetite, and must keep a constant watch upon his own behaviour. Natural difficulties will step before him, and he must not only have an eye to watch the behaviour of others, but he must have a heart both wise and stout enough to stem the tide of perplexities which they will pour in his way. Whatever be the business we are engaged in, the means we make use of in pursuing it are troublesome, the attainment of the end we aim at is uncertain, and the enjoyment of it short and unsatisfactory.—

“Our days,” (so says Solomon) “are sorrows, our travel grief; our heart taketh not rest in the night;”—and yet remaineth this question — “What hath man for all his labour, and the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun?”

Eccles. ii. 22.—God hath providently annexed a necessity to the business of life, otherwise, encumbered as it is, man would certainly decline it; and he has kindly intermixed some enjoyments to relieve it, otherwise man, weak as he is, would certainly sink under it;—as it is, we feel it sufficient to de-

serve our care, but not perfect enough to command our affections.

If the serious business of life be thus unsatisfactory, what shall we say of its pleasures? — They are more apt to lay hold of the affection, and yet have less real worth to deserve it. They are not a necessary duty of our condition, as business is — the end they aim at has not that reason to recommend and dignify it, which the end of business hath — and the means applied for the attainment of it have not less, perhaps they have more, embarrassment than belongs to business.

The sensual pleasures of life — riches — or the pomp of honour, have no solid content or satisfaction in them — they are delusive meteors, that catch our attention, but mislead us from true happiness, rather than conduct us to it.

The sensualist pursues a variety of pleasures — which very plainly intimates how insufficient any of them are to make him happy. For why does he change his pleasures and seek fresh ones, but because the old ones are palled and insufficient? It is not so in the business of life. The pleasure arising from the pursuit of business, though it be not complete

pleat happiness, yet so far satisfies the mind as to confine it to the object it has chosen; few men, who feel a real pleasure in their proper business, seriously covet the pleasure arising from any other. Their own pleasure is satisfactory.—The case is, the pleasure which business yields is a rational pleasure, and rational pleasures improve upon enjoyment; but the irrational pleasures of appetite are destroyed by being indulged.

Would the sensualist fairly state his account, and impartially balance his uneasinesses against his pleasures, he must feel himself a loser by his choice;—that he will not own himself so, is no wonder; men will suffer much pain rather than they will suffer a little shame, and, so long as they can cheat the world into an opinion that they are happy, they care not how much convinced they themselves are that they are miserable.

Days consumed in vanity, and nights wasted in debauchery, will disturb the reflections of the morning, if not shatter them with remorse. The libertine rises from his pillow with a detestation of the past day, and a horror of the present; and no sooner lifts his thoughts from the flood of pleasure, to meet the influence of reason and religion, but he
sickens

sickens at the touch, and plunges back into vice, to hide him from remorse; — this, if it does not weaken the intellectual faculties, at least perverts them, and sets men upon the desperate work of turning the weapons of reason against itself. Men first wish wrong, and then they reason wrong; and the faculties which are given them for discovering their duty, are applied in finding means, first for avoiding it, and then for bringing it into contempt. — This is self-murder in the foulest degree, as the stroke is aimed at the most valuable part of our nature.

Yet this wound men hardly feel, till by degrees their progress in vicious pleasure exposes them to others, which, though really less fatal, are more sensibly felt, because they are more hardly concealed. When sensual enjoyments have ruined the mind, they have an easy step to the ruin of every external advantage; and when health, fortune, and friends forsake the sensualist, he then begins, too late, to feel himself wrong in giving up conscience, virtue, and religion.

The *riches of the world* bid fairer for making us happy than the sensual pleasures of it; because they are capable of a proper application, and, when properly applied, are a
guard

guard against many inconveniences that belong to life. But, after all, the happiness they afford is but a negative sort of happiness; they may make us *not so miserable*, but real positive happiness is beyond their purchase. At the same time that they guard us against some inconveniences, they throw us in the way of others; and if they shelter us from reasons for complaining, they hardly supply us with reasons for rejoicing. Care and anxiety attend the acquirement, the possession, and the disposal of riches; and, as a proof that they are no ingredient of true happiness, the only rational pleasure they afford is that which arises from parting with them. This is true in the *reasonable* care and use of riches; but when we reflect where an *immoderate* care after them, and an unreasonable abuse of them, will lead men — through what anxiety, through what iniquity, and to what misery — we shall have as little reason to conclude, from the condition of those who have them, that they are the ingredients of happiness, as we shall have to conclude from their behaviour that they are the reward of virtue.

The prodigal finds his wealth a continual incitement and direction to vice; and, if the miser keeps himself clear from the guilt of debauchery,

debauchery, he contracts a no less odious guilt from sordidness, inhumanity, and knavery. What are his shining heaps, that lust of his eyes, but the *torment* as well as the *delight* of his heart? Or, if he is sensible only of the latter, his condition is so much the worse, as it shews that his avarice, like a canker, preys upon him unobserved, and poisons every virtue of the mind, without giving him any pain that may awaken him to protect them. Yet, to what purpose is his sordid accumulation? Why is the niggard so profuse as to purchase wealth at the dear expence of his quiet and his virtue? — Misfortune may dissipate his heaps — at least death will shut his eyes from a survey of them; and where has been the great happiness arising from his wealth, which he never enjoyed while living, and dying must leave behind him?

As to the *pomp and pride of life*, this is apparently no fit object of our esteem or affection. This at the best is but an imaginary good; it does not reach the senses, as pleasures do, nor is it any security against the evils of life, as riches often are. Honour is not so properly any thing that we possess, as it is something, such as it is, which others give, nor can it subsist but by the help and communication

munication of others. — Where is the honour of a solitary man? What is title, where there are none to acknowledge it, or superior dignity, where there are none beneath him? — This then is too visionary to be the foundation of solid happiness. Follow the man whose honours dazzle your eyes, and enquire how they affect his heart; — they either do not reach it, or they reach it but to poison it; if they have that effect upon the heart, virtue will warn us from fixing our affections on it; if they have no effect upon the heart, our happiness is not concerned in the attainment of them.

Upon the whole. — This world affords us nothing worth our esteem and affection. All it contains is fleeting and transitory. The serious business of it has more pain than pleasure, and, whilst it is too necessary to be neglected, is too uncertain to be depended upon. The enjoyments of life, if reasonably pursued, are no more than trifles for our amusement; if immoderately applied, they are vicious and destructive; — in one case they are too weak to make us happy, in the other they serve to make us miserable.

Where then shall we go for the proper object of our esteem, and the foundation of our true happiness? — Religion is at hand to direct us.

S E R M O N LVI.

The same Subject continued.

MATTHEW xiii. 45, 46.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

LET us then see what religion affords. I need not observe, that by religion I mean the Christian religion, that religion, which Christ hath set forth in his gospel. All other religions, as they are called, are either false or insufficient. It is on the Christian religion we must stand, if we hope for salvation.

The religion which Christ hath set forth in his gospel concerns both this state and the next. So far as it is concerned with our present

sent state, it proposes a duty ; as it is concerned with a future state, it promises an eternal reward for the performance of such duty. — And some perhaps may be inclined to think, that without encouragement from the latter, the former would be impracticable—as if God had enjoined us a disagreeable and unreasonable business here, in order to get at his favour hereafter.

Not so;—the business of religion is neither disagreeable nor unreasonable, quite otherwise; and though there are circumstances belonging to human life, not to religion, which may make it seem so, and which would be too apt to bias our judgment, without the expectation of another life, yet, though the final reward of religion lies beyond the present life, it has its natural encouragements within it—I mean the natural satisfaction attending a religious course of life. Some such encouragement it must have belonging to it; for God never sets his creatures to work merely to shew his authority, but for their own benefit; and godliness has the promise of this life as well as that which is to come.

The first, and perhaps the hardest, step in the duty of religion is the denial of worldly lusts. But this does not mean the denial of natural,

natural; but the controul of irregular appetite. When religion enjoins this, it enjoins nothing new; it is the dictate of reason to keep our appetites within due bounds, and those who are fond of worldly lusts must quarrel with natural religion as well as with the Gospel of Christ, if they resent the laying an injunction upon them.

Now the advantage attending a restraint of irregular appetites is evident from the mischief which attends the indulgence of them—which is the destruction of every good belonging to our nature. Whether we consider ourselves only as creatures made up of flesh and blood, or, whether we consider ourselves as rational, or farther as religious creatures—in any of these views an indulgence of irregular appetite is destructive. It shatters the animal constitution, weakens or perverts the rational powers, and sets us in rebellion against God. Now, in proportion as an indulgence of appetite works these mischiefs, the restraint of it will work the opposite good—will preserve the natural constitution, strengthen the rational powers, and set us in favour with God. As to the uneasiness attending the restraint—is there no satisfaction?—There is a superior satisfaction in the reflection that we have acted

as becomes us — we feel the pleasure attending victory, a pleasure always proportionable to the mischief it subdues — we feel encouragement and strength for farther denials, for, as one compliance with appetite brings on another, so one refusal leads to more — we feel, what is above all, a consciousness of pleasing God.

Such satisfaction indeed may go for nothing, with those who are immersed in sensual indulgences — they compare it with their own pleasures, and pronounce it insipid, but would they compare it with their own uneasinesses they would see it in a different light. And this is the just way of stating the comparison, as it is comparing the consequences of each behaviour together. The mischiefs and compunctions which harass the sensual man, will never stand a comparison with the quiet and self-complacency, which the religious man enjoys, nor are the calls of disappointed appetite in the one to be compared with the scourges of a neglected conscience in the other.

But we shall take a very imperfect view of religion, if we only consider it as it is employed in restraining irregular appetite; if we only consider it as putting us upon denying ourselves

ourselves certain enjoyments, without observing, that it places us beyond the want of such enjoyments. Its first step is resistance, which, if it be difficult, is followed by others as pleasurable and easy as that is troublesome. After combating vicious inclinations, the next step in the business of religion is cultivating virtuous ones; and when once we are arrived at a mastery over the passions, the cultivation of virtue becomes an easy work. — In this situation the religious man may challenge the happiest sensualist to vie with him either in the pleasure or the advantage of his employment.

That there is a real pleasure attending upon religion, is natural to expect; for what is the whole business of religion, but to follow the dictates of reason under the instruction and assistance of Christ? To follow the dictates of reason is the natural duty of a man, to follow them under the instruction of Christ is the religious duty of a Christian. Now we cannot suppose, but that what is our natural duty must be adapted for affording us our proper and consequently our truest pleasure; else God has thrown contradictions into our condition, and made our duty direct us one way, whilst our happiness directs us another. Man's true

pleasure then, as a rational creature, must arise from following the dictates of reason; and if he feels what he calls a pleasure in acting contrary to them, it is not his true pleasure, as he will find upon comparing it with what is so — he will find the one unsatisfactory in the enjoyment, and mischievous in its consequences, the other he will find to be both satisfactory and safe.

If then the true pleasure of man, as a rational creature, arises from following the dictates of reason, will it be less so, when he follows them under the assistance of religion? If it be a pleasure to pursue them, that pleasure must be increased, the better we are directed and secured in that pursuit. Now the advantages which the Christian religion affords upon this point are great. It plainly, and with additional authority, sets forth the virtues we should pursue — it assists and strengthens the soul in the pursuit of them, by the influence of God's Holy Spirit working within us — it farther encourages us by a gracious condescension of pardon for our frequent failures, and the hopes of eternal happiness as a reward for our obedience; — when we consider these advantages, which our religion affords us in the pursuit of virtue, it is reasonable to conclude,

clude, that what was before pleasurable as our proper duty, must be more so in proportion as it is made not only a more easy, but also a more advantageous one.

As the pursuit of virtue, assisted by religion, affords us our truest pleasure, it must afford us our truest advantage. Man may separate these two points in his operations, but God, in his work, connects them, nor does he set a pleasure before us which is not at the same time our advantage.

The easy and serene state of mind, which is the result of virtue and religion, affords great opportunity for supplying the soul with whatever can enlarge its knowledge or its hopes. Study and contemplation bring in materials for the improvement of the one, and religion opens the prospect to which the other is directed; nor is there any situation more worthy the wishes of a man, than that, where, free from the impertinent calls of unruly appetite, or the mischievous consequences which attend the indulgence of them, men have liberty and inclination to pursue the business of the soul, and, by daily improving in wisdom and goodness, are daily taking those steps toward eternal happiness which nature and religion recommend. — And let no one think, that this state

of the soul, which we make the effect of virtue and religion, is only an airy description, or not peculiar to that condition. Such as think these topics of no use but to dress out a description, discover that they themselves are strangers to their truth; a discovery, which turns more to their own disgrace than the discredit of the observation: and such as think that these advantages are not peculiar to a state of virtue and religion will consider, that if they may be had without it, they are best had and best enjoyed within it; that however knowledge, for instance, may be attained without a cultivation of virtue and religion, it is however best applied under their influence; and that true wisdom is ever connected with true goodness.

Neither is it an inconsiderable recommendation of virtue and religion, that they best qualify us for the enjoyment of the world.

The enjoyment of the world, we say, consists in satisfying our wishes and our wants. Now, as we cannot command the world, and reach ourselves whatever we may either want or wish for, it is an equivalent measure, whoever takes it, to shorten our desires, that so we may supply the loss of enjoyment by not feeling the appetites that call for it. This
station

station at least virtue and religion will procure us, and we shall find ourselves happier in a freedom from irregular appetites than the sensualist is in his enjoyment of them. Nor shall we miss another material circumstance in the enjoyment of the world, which consists in a proper use of what we are allowed to obtain. The same conduct which secures us from irregular appetite, will direct us in the application of our reasonable and successful attainments; for it is vice that is the true cause of abuse, and where virtue has put us in possession she will ordinarily continue her authority in the use of it.

Thus furnished with virtue and religion for our own enjoyment of the world, we are qualified for assisting others for their enjoyment of it. For virtue and religion do not confine us at home, but send us abroad, and will not allow us to think our own happiness complete without assisting the happiness of others. And how closely public virtues are connected with private ones — how much the good man has the advantage above the sensualist or the selfish man, in making himself valuable and useful to mankind, is too plain to need illustrating. A denial of irregular appetite, and the cultivation of frugality, sobriety, and temperance, as

they feed the heart with content, so they give room and inclination for the exercise of justice and generosity; but intemperance, sensuality, and sordidness, too fond an attachment either to the pleasures or what are called the advantages of the world, poison the heart, stop the current of justice and generosity, and render us the contempt, if not the pests, of society.

Such then are the natural encouragements attending the business of religion in restraining appetite and cultivating virtue, the means by which we procure our own ease and improvement here, and become useful as well as agreeable to others. And I have considered this matter only as a *duty* incumbent upon us in this state, without considering the *reward* which awaits it in the next; because in this light only the competition will stand between the business of religion and the engagements of the world. When we consider religion as the means by which we procure eternal happiness hereafter, the preference in favour of religion is too evident to admit of a competition. — It is very true, this is what we should always remember, because we are too liable to falter in our duty if we forget it; but if any shall insinuate, that the prospect of a future reward is the only circumstance in religion which influences the behaviour

behaviour of those who observe it, the insinuation is wrong — religion has intrinsic reasons of recommendation, as well as an external reward to which it is leading us, and if it deserves our choice above the engagements of the world, when considered only with the natural encouragements attending it here, much more will it deserve our preference when considered with the extraordinary advantages attending it hereafter.

The prospect which religion opens to us into the next life, the strong assurance it gives us of eternal happiness as a reward for our obedience, is a suitable balance against the strong temptations which the present pleasures of vice, or the severer conditions of life, may throw in our way; and we have reason to be thankful for a provision of this encouragement, which all may want upon one or other of those accounts; yet, when the happiness of another life has once set us right in the business of this, has drawn us from the engagements of vice, and encouraged us to meet severities with resolution, we then feel ourselves within the influence of other reasons for continuing the course of virtue we have begun. We are sensible of the natural advantages attending it, and, as we were at first virtuous because we hoped

hoped for a reward, we continue to be so, not only because we still hope for a reward, but because we feel a present enjoyment of it. — The good man feels this to be true; and 'tis reasonable to expect it should be so; — for God deals with us as with reasonable creatures, and draws us to our duty, not merely to make us obedient to his will, but to make us happy; and when God calls us to account, there will appear this circumstance to illustrate his goodness, and confound the folly and ingratitude of those who shall have neglected it — that God's purpose in the moral state of man was, — to make him easy here, in order to make him happy hereafter.

SERMON

S E R M O N LVII.

THE SOWER.

MATTHEW xiii. 3.

A Sower went forth to sow.

THAT the different dispositions of men are the cause of the different success which the Gospel meets with among them, is the general lesson which the parable of the Sower sets before us.

When Christ came to restore mankind, he did not come to alter their natures ; but, as he found them free agents, he left them such ; as he found them actual transgressors of the law of nature, so he left them capable of disobeying the law of his Gospel ; — it is, therefore, no objection against the Gospel, that men are unfruitful under it, if such want of success be owing, not to any deficiency in the

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Gospel

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Gospel

Gospel itself, but to some defect in those on whom it is employed. If we will admit no law, but what works with infallible effect, we must have, besides a perfect law, a perfect nature too : or, the law must have irresistible power to enforce it ; and then it would be no suitable law to the free agency of man.

This being the case, that the Gospel is in itself sufficient to reform mankind, it will be always proper to reflect, by what defects in the disposition of mankind it is rendered unsuccessful. To this purpose our Saviour has given us the parable of the Sower.

Considering the establishment of the Gospel among us — the many assistances we have in being made acquainted with it — the general mode of education — and the public ministry of the church, it is to be presumed, that all of us step forth into the world, with the seeds of the Christian religion sown on our minds (according to the figurative stile of the parable), or, in plain language, with some notions of religion about us ; but how soon many lose those notions in the pleasures of youth, or suffocate them in the business of advanced age, we see — yet we see likewise those, who, by attention and care, carry their religion with them

them through life, and reap improvement proportionable to their care.

1. Our Saviour says, "when any one hear-
"eth the word and understandeth it not." Something, besides hearing the word, is requisite for improvement under it; our Saviour calls it "understanding the word," *i. e.* not merely comprehending the meaning of what is said; for, as it may often be no fault in some, that they do not understand what they hear, so it is no merit in others, that they do understand, unless, besides understanding what they hear, they also consider what they understand. — This is what our Saviour means; and what we are very deficient in: his instructions are sufficiently adapted to the understanding; but, by not giving them due consideration, they make no impression on the heart; they are laid early and constantly before us; and we are so used to them, that we disregard them; — but it is regard that must excite attention and consideration, which only lead us to improvement — to be effectually instructed we must not only hear, but be affected with what we are taught. — Our Saviour farther says, of these inconsiderate dispositions, that "the wicked one cometh, and
"catcheth away that which is sown — lest
"they

“ they should believe and be saved.” The weakest avocations will call the mind from lessons which have made no impression on it; nor is this the worst; the heart, that is empty of good impressions, has full room for bad ones; and a want of attention to Christ’s lessons, not only beguiles us of the benefit we might receive from them, but betrays us into the mischief of direct contrary lessons. — The devil rejoices over an empty heart; and ’tis a work he has ever found successful, from unprofitable hearers of Christ’s word to make enemies to his authority.

2. There are many who consider Christianity more as a matter of speculation and amusement, than as having that importance which really belongs to it; such, if they have no enmity against the Gospel, can scarcely be said to have an affection for it. Christ’s instructions upon these tempers are like corn sown upon a rock; where there is soil enough to receive it, but not to nourish it; so that it quickly springs up, and as quickly decays. Men of levity and curiosity catch at any thing that falls in their way; but, that once satisfied, they grow indifferent in the possession of that which gave them joy in the discovery.

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The business of Christ was not to amuse, but to instruct, his hearers ; and the Gospel he has left is intended, not to exercise our ingenuity, but to reform our manners : it was given, more to correct the practice than the reason of mankind — to direct us to that obedience which was wanted ; and is therefore frustrated in its main design, unless we make it the rule of our actions as well as of our opinions. — Here lies the mischief — the understanding is less depraved than the will ; propositions in theory easily gain the assent of the understanding, because we assent without feeling any pain : propositions in practice are quite different things ; they require the assent of the will, as well as the understanding ; which oft-times cannot be given, but at the loss of something pleasureable to us ; we flatter ourselves, therefore, that the assent of the understanding is sufficient, because we don't care to afford that of the will ; and hence it is that many among us are more ready in discerning an argument in support of the Gospel, than they are in practising the lessons it recommends. — But a season of trial proves too much for such speculative Christians ; the warmth of temptation soon exhausts their slender supply of vigour, and the rude blasts

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of persecution soon overturn a religion, whose root strikes no deeper than the understanding, and has not laid hold on the affection of the heart. — When religion does not reach the heart, it is not good for much; if it leaves that under the full power of the passions — if it turns out no vice — if it corrects no inordinate desire — if it introduces no virtue, but is confined to the understanding only — it is more for state than service.

3. Too close an attention to the world is another cause, which hinders our improvement under the Gospel. Christ's instructions take root in such tempers, and spring up; but, like corn sown among weeds, they are choaked, and hindered from growing to perfection. Worldly-minded men may be candid enough to admit the Gospel, upon examining the evidences in its favour; they may be serious enough to resolve it shall be the rule of their behaviour, as well as faith: but they are not always watchful enough to keep the business and the pleasures of the world within their proper limits; but, by bestowing too much thought upon them, and too little upon religion, they encourage the growth of worldly passions; and, if they keep their sense of religion alive, they hardly shew the fruits of it by a suitable

suitable practice. — It is true, the business of the world must be followed; and it is commendable, as well as necessary, to be industrious in supplying the reasonable wants belonging to our several stations; but the satisfaction of supplying real wants too often leads to the gratifying artificial ones; and, when the passions continue the demands which business has begun, men's thoughts are wholly taken up by the objects they are pursuing, or step but sparingly forth to take care of their religion, which lies smothered under a heap of cares, and loses the merit of being alive, because it is not active.

4. As corn is most fruitful when sown on good ground, so the Gospel has best effect when it is set in an honest and good heart. By which is meant, a disposition that is ready to believe the Gospel, on reasonable evidence of its truth, and to apply the religion it contains, as the rule of our behaviour. By this disposition is not meant a prejudice in favour of the Gospel; but a freedom from all prejudice against it. No instruction can be effectual, but upon this foundation; and surely it is so far from being a blemish to the Gospel, that it requires the same disposition, which every instruction requires, that 'tis a circumstance

in its favour, when it does not force itself upon us, but recommends itself to our choice; but, as this is a circumstance in commendation of the Gospel, so it will highly condemn us, if we reject it without examination, or examine it without candor. The honest man is led to an examination of the Gospel from a sense of this plain truth — that the weakness of man may need instruction, and the goodness of God may supply him with it; and finding, upon an impartial enquiry, that the Gospel has all the evidence to prove it a divine revelation, which the nature of the thing will reasonably admit, and such as is allowed to be sufficient in cases of the like nature, he thankfully receives it as God's direction for leading him to heaven and happiness. If any think, that those are enslaved, and have no free use of judgment, who admit the Gospel upon authority from others, and by their education — whilst they only judge freely, who lay aside those prejudices before they examine it — they may be told — that, the nature and condition of mankind considered, some must take their religion, as well as other important matters in life, upon authority from others; and, that the merit of men's religion lies, not in the method by which

which they attained it, but, in their living up to it, however they came by it. With respect to education, they may be told, that such are not less free in the use of their judgment, who, in their maturer years, maintain that religion upon principles of reason, which they first received upon the authority of others; nor, on the other hand, are *they* less slaves, who have laid aside the principles of their education, but are led by, not less strong, but, far less commendable, prejudices.

The evidence of the Gospel has no sooner satisfied the judgment of the honest and impartial enquirer, but the important design of it immediately affects his heart; convinced that it is the word of God, he resolves, as he feels reason, to *obey* as well as to *believe* it: he gives it the consideration, which its importance demands; and, sensible of the design for which it is given, he carries it to the heart, and there makes it the principle and rule of his behaviour. — Without this, our faith will have no merit; nay, it will encrease our condemnation, if we believe the Gospel to be the word of God, and do not think ourselves obliged to follow its directions, or if we act in defiance of the obligation which we feel and which we acknowledge. — In short, rea-

son may set the word within us, but it is meditation that must give it root, and make it fruitful ; a single examination of its evidence may convince us of its truth, but it is a frequent consideration of what it sets forth to us, and a serious reflection on our own sinful, and (without this remedy) desperate condition, that must lead us to the proper use of it, and the inestimable benefits arising from such use.

After thus receiving and understanding the word, the third thing implied, in an honest and good heart, is — a patient and steady perseverance in the application of it to the conduct of our lives.

I say steady perseverance—for we are more ready to resolve well, than we are steady to execute what we resolve. When we consider the reasonableness of the doctrines which the Gospel sets before us — the great work of our redemption, which Christ, the Son of God, hath wrought for us by his death and satisfaction — and the immortal happiness he hath promised ; — when, I say, these objects only are before the mind, there is no difficulty, we feel pleasure and alacrity, in resolving to behave as becomes those before whom such duty and such blessings are set ; — but, these,
being

being matters speculative, and at a distance, are apt to be set aside by the matters of the world, which are sensible and about us;—and here lies the great point and stress of Christian duty—not in present resolution, which may be the result of a single thought and the act of a single moment, but in future and constant execution, which is the result, not of a single thought, but of habit, not the act of a moment, but the work of time, and of trial.

In the course of which, however, we shall do well to distinguish between *perseverance* and *perfection*; perfection we may not expect, yet perseverance is very consistent with the want of perfection; nor are we to let it go, because in many cases it fails of success;—perseverance will certainly improve us in duty, though it does not make us perfect in it. We should diligently guard against failures; but they should not dishearten us in our progress;—it is one thing to fall into sin, and another to turn away from goodness; the one may be our misfortune, which, though it stops our speed, may not divert our progress; the other is matter of choice, and is quite inconsistent with perseverance. A man may be constant in a right path, though he stumbles in it; but

he who takes a different path, doth not stumble, but goes wilfully wrong.

Our general lesson, from the parable before us, is this:—We must not suffer either the cares or the enjoyments of the world to rise so high in our hearts as to choak our faith, or hinder our practice; we must remember, that our true interest, and real happiness, lies in another state, to which the Gospel of Christ is intended to conduct us; we must therefore lay hold of that, and, by a constant attention to its guidance, make our way through the business and pleasures of this world, with so much notice of them, as is sufficient to support and to relieve us in our passage, but without such attachment to them as will retard us, or make us forget where we are going.

It is the conscientious care of the good Christian to have his religion not only alive, but active, within him, by a serious use of those helps which may maintain it, and a no less watchful use of all such opportunities as may set it at work. He *uses* this world, but does not *abuse* it. He submits to those cares of it, which belong to the duty of his station, but wisely and soberly declines those, which his passions would prompt him to undertake. He enjoys the pleasures of this world with a thankful,

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ful, but a moderate and modest heart, with a sense, sufficient to make him less uneasy under the necessary anxieties of life, but not enough to make him too fond of the enjoyments belonging to it. Neither the cares nor the pleasures of the world encroach upon his virtue, or rise so high as to overshadow it. His principal view is to be happy in the next world; his secondary view is to be as happy in this, as the nature of it, and the expectation of the next, will admit. His virtue thus finds room to rise and flourish; whilst his worldly cares, the thorns which surround it, by being checked in their growth, afford him a clearer prospect of the state he is looking for, as well as an easier escape from this, whenever he is called to leave it. Thus disposed, his virtues encrease in number as well as strength; for virtues naturally produce each other, and a single one well cultivated, like a single seed well rooted, will bring forth a manifold encrease.— Thus the good Christian stands, flourishing and fair, in the field of life, till death puts in his sickle—and then is carried home to the garner, like a shock of corn in its season, to encrease the riches and glory of heaven.

S E R M O N LVIII.

ON THE PERMISSION OF EVIL.

MATTHEW xiii. 30.

Let both grow together until the harvest.

THE parable of the Tares is a vindication of divine Providence in suffering so much wickedness to prevail in the world. We shall not act wisely for ourselves, if we be disheartened at it, or reverently towards God, if it makes us dissatisfied with his providence.

The world, this scene of human things, is a part of God's government; which there will be no reason to impeach, if God does not make, but controuls, the wickedness arising in it, and if the wickedness he permits here shall be judged hereafter.

God

God hath made us free agents; to do what is good, or to do what is evil, as we choose; but still, accountable to his judgment for both. It is this constitutes us rational creatures.—Will any one say, God should not have made such creatures, and that man should have been as much a piece of mechanism, as the earth he walks on?—'Till that be proved, God cannot, morally speaking, prevent men, absolutely, from doing the evil, which he hath made them free to do, if they choose it; it is sufficient, that God shews them reasons why they should not choose it, helps their attention to those reasons, and declares his future judgment upon them if they do choose it. This sets God's government clear of impeachment from the wickedness observable in the world, as that is the unavoidable consequence of man's nature and freedom; for God's government of man must be suitable to the nature of man.—And if the present scene of things be not the whole, but a part only, of God's government over man, we must look forward, as well as around us, for forming a true judgment of it; and if men shall at last be dealt with, according as they have chosen to do good or evil, Divine govern-
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ment is vindicated, whatever we may observe, or whatever we may feel, at present.

This is common argument on the subject before us, and satisfactory. Yet, when we see so much wickedness in the world, though we do not impeach Providence for permitting it, or doubt his final judgment of it, yet our present feelings prompt us to wish for a removal of it. We are ready to say, with the servants in the parable, “Wilt thou that we go, and gather up these tares?” — But it may not be; — and that, for the reason which the householder gives — “Lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat also. Let both grow together until the harvest.”

Good men are too hasty, if they wish to live at present with none but such who are like themselves. That happy condition is reserved for their reward in another life, after having faithfully discharged the duties of the present. In the mean time, such are the connections in human life, that we cannot do without the mutual assistance of each other; and such is the disposition of human nature, that men are more prone to wickedness than goodness — so that we must take the world as we find it: we cannot expect, that God should

should counteract what he hath established ; either by enabling us not to want the mutual assistance of each other, which yet he hath appointed us to live by — or, by suffering none but good men to remain among us, when yet he hath left all men to be good or bad as they shall choose.

Mankind is, and must be, made up of the wicked and the good. Had sin never entered the world, we had been a society of good men only ; and, however Almighty wisdom might have disposed of them, after their appointed time on earth (of which we know nothing), would, without dying, have been happy in God's favour. But man, as a free being, chose sin, and sin introduced death. And though God has graciously interposed a remedy for recovering us from sin and death, and reinstating us in his favour, yet, as this remedy is set before the same free beings, for their choice in the application or neglect of it, there will still be a mixture among us of good and bad men. Some will apply, others will neglect, this remedy. This must necessarily be the case, if God redeemed the same free natures he created ; nor can any reason be assigned, why man should be redeemed impeccable, but what will prove, that he ought

to have been created so; nor can any reason be assigned, why man should have been created impeccable, but what leads directly to this absurd, not to say profane, reproach on the work of God—that no such beings as men, nor indeed as angels, should ever have been created.

Since then our human condition in society connects us together for mutual assistance, and our natural condition as free agents leaves us to the choice of being wicked or good, yet under a much stronger propensity to the former than the latter, we must be content with the world as it is—especially as this life, this transitory scene of things, is not the whole of God's government over man.— Besides that the wish for a removal of the wicked, where none are good, in the sight of God, reaches farther than we are aware;—unless we think fit to direct Providence, what wicked men he shall remove, and what wicked men he shall let remain; which we have as much right and as much reason to do, as to be dissatisfied with his providence for permitting so many wicked men among us as he does.

The reason of man, a noble faculty when well cultivated, and well directed, makes a weak
and

and contemptible figure, when it sets itself against the wisdom of God. As noble a faculty as it is, it needs assistance in our present imperfect state; and it is best assisted, when, looking at God's appointments, it thence directs its own operations. But when it takes the contrary course, and, vainly fond of its own operations, presumes to arraign the operations of God, it discovers nothing but pride and weakness.

When the infidel says — ‘My own reason
 ‘ tells me, that a world, so full of wicked-
 ‘ ness and mischief, cannot be under the go-
 ‘ vernment of a good and wise God’ —
 what he calls his *reason* is no more than his
wish, his argument is to look for. It is no
 rational argument, that a good God does not
 govern the world, because there is wicked-
 ness in it, any more than it is a rational
 argument, that a good king does not govern
 his kingdom, because there are bad and rebel-
 lious subjects in it. But, you will say, a good
 and a wise king will remove or punish such
 subjects;—so does God—he even gives man a
 commission to do it here; and for those whom
 he reserves, for their repentance, or, if that
 fails, for their punishment hereafter, they are
 both agreeable to the ends of government,
 and

and rationally consistent with the character of a wise and good governor.

But supposing the infidel's conclusion to be a just one—that, because there is so much wickedness and mischief in the world, therefore a good and wise God does not govern it—what light, what advantage arises from this conclusion? Does it shew us how we may prevent, or does it better enable us to bear, this circumstance in our situation? What use can the infidel make of this notable conclusion, to which his own reason has so handsomely conducted him?—He has a use for it—which he will not tell us—namely, to cover his fears;—for, if there be a God, woe to them, who have denied him, or dare not abide his judgment.

An unprejudiced mind is easily convinced, that there is a God who made and governs the world, and that he is infinitely wise, just, and good—that he hath appointed this world for our state of trial and duty, and the next for our state of judgment and reward. From a view of this grand truth we learn to direct our reasonings on the wickedness observable among us, and the deductions we make in this way of operation are useful and sound.

Being

Being well assured that we live under the government of a wise, just, and good God, the next step is plain—that the wickedness observable in the world is by his permission; from whence the conclusion follows undeniably—that such permission is right. When both reason and revelation have shewn us the government of God, it is surely conclusive to say, Because God governs the world, therefore the permission of wickedness in it is right; but when men shut their eyes against reason and revelation, and look only at what they see before them, it is by no means conclusive to say, Because there is wickedness in the world, therefore God does not govern it—or, to come up to the infidel's true point—therefore there is no God.

The government of God is employed in controuling the wickedness of man. It were inconsistent with God's perfections to suppose him the author or encourager of wickedness; but it is strictly consistent with his perfections to say, that, when men have made themselves wicked, God controuls the effects of it, and directs them to the purposes of his government over them. This is not only agreeable to Divine goodness, but is the proper work of
Divine

Divine power ; for less than a Divine power is not adequate to the work of inspecting and controuling the wickedness of the world ; of directing its consequences to fall where he thinks fit, for the purposes of his government over man, and where men least expect them ; and of suppressing or removing them according to his will.

Revelation shews us this government of God, and what it shews us is as comfortable as it is true. For what a dreadful prospect does the infidel's conclusion open to us ! a scene of wickedness, over which is set no government, no controul ; where no reason can be assigned, why it should not encrease and overwhelm us — as it long since had done, had not a wise and good God governed the world ; under whose Almighty care and inspection it is comfortable to reflect — that there can be no more wickedness in the world than God permits, and which, however it arises from the heart of man, shall carry its consequences, directed by the eye and hand of God, to no other than his own wise and good purposes.

For, having placed us here in a state of trial, God hath given work for us to do, and they

look but little around them, or within themselves, who do not see, and feel, that wicked men supply constant work for good men. If our work be virtue, our connection with the wicked holds us close to the exercise of it, in order to attain goodness — for virtue is our way to goodness, and to our improvement in it — it is a human quality, belonging to a state of trial, as it implies being good, in opposition to what would tempt or force us to be otherwise. And we all know, what work for our virtue the wicked daily set before us, in withstanding their temptations, in sustaining and forgiving the injuries we receive from them — what opportunities they afford us for exercising charity, benevolence, and mercy, constancy, and fortitude, and, — which crowns all human goodness, what calls they set before us for our trust and reliance on God. Had not the cruelty of the wicked called them forth, we had lost those great examples of Christian trust and fortitude the blessed martyrs, for whom is laid up in heaven a proportionable reward of glory; — and, had not the wicked sent forth infidels to oppose and deride the Gospel of Christ, we had not seen those examples of honouring Christ by withstanding

withstanding them, which faithful Christians have shewn, or that full display of its evidence, and explanation of its doctrine, which has arisen from the defence of it. — And I may add — did not the wicked afford such public examples of the miserable consequences which attend vice, how many more might be ruined by its allurements! — God only, and they who feel it, know, what, and how extensive good effect such examples work in reclaiming numbers, who are treading the like paths, though they be not effectual in working a general reformation. — “The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him,” and whoever corrects his own vicious disposition, on seeing the miserable effect of it in others, has a secret between God and himself, which, though the world knows it not, will turn to infinite advantage at his tribunal.

Thus God, in the course of his Almighty government, brings good out of evil, and makes the wickedness of some the cause of goodness in others. This should make us less dissatisfied at the continuance of the wicked among us, and, as we see they have their use in the system, should apply them accordingly, which may turn to our improvement, rather than be anxious for their removal,

which is not in our power. In the mean time, it is no recommendation of the wicked, that, by the over-ruling power of Providence, or our own discretion, they become instrumental in producing good; much less is it a reason, why they should not, as occasions call for it, be removed both from divine and human government. — It is true, the parable says — “let both
 “grow together until the harvest,” without any particular exceptions; — but parables are for general truths, not for particular cases.—God permits a general mixture of good and bad men in the human system. This is the whole proposition of the parable; and this proposition holds, though God may think fit to remove particular wicked men on particular occasions. We may not be able always to distinguish such particular events, and should be cautious in pointing them out; but they are oftentimes too much distinguished to be unnoticed;— and there is the less reason to be inquisitive after such removals of the wicked, as carry extraordinary marks of the Divine hand, since God’s ordinary government, by the ministry of man, generally answers the purpose — That the tares may not be too luxuriant,

riant, so as to choak the good corn growing in his field, God hath given man a commission to inspect and cultivate it; and we daily see the hand of human justice busy in plucking up such rank and poisonous tares among us, as are grown too strong to be endured.

On 10/10/10

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S E R M O N LIX.

The same Subject continued.

MATTHEW xiii. 30.

Let both grow together until the harvest.

IN my last discourse I observed—that in the parable of the Tares vindicates the government of Providence in his permission of wickedness in the world—that the entire removal of wicked men would be detrimental to the good, considered in their social state, and depending on each other's assistance—that it would be farther detrimental to them, considered in their state of trial, as it would diminish the exercise of their virtue, which is the proper work belonging to such state;—and farther, that though God, for these rea-

sons, permits wicked men to remain among us, yet this hinders not, but that he may, and frequently does, remove many of them, either by his own immediate hand, or, which amounts to the same thing, by the intermediate ministry of human government.

But the main point in the parable, for vindicating God's government, with respect to his permission of wickedness in this world, is the declaration it contains of his purpose to judge and punish it in the next. — “ Let
 “ both grow together until the harvest ; and
 “ in the time of harvest I will say to the
 “ reapers, Gather ye together first the tares,
 “ and bind them in bundles to burn them,
 “ but gather the wheat into my barn.” Our Saviour's exposition follows. “ The harvest
 “ is the end of the world, and the reapers
 “ are the angels ; as therefore the tares are
 “ gathered and burnt in the fire, so shall it be
 “ in the end of this world. The Son of Man
 “ shall send forth his angels, and they shall
 “ gather out of his kingdom all that do ini-
 “ quity, and cast them into a furnace of
 “ fire ;— and then shall the righteous shine
 “ forth, as the sun, in the kingdom of their
 “ father.”

Our

Our Saviour here expressly assures us of another state after this ; in which good men shall be rewarded, and wicked men shall be punished. And this it is which vindicates the Divine conduct in bearing with the wicked in this state, rather than he will disorder his government of mankind by a general removal of them. For, was there no other state for mankind but the present, it would not sufficiently vindicate the Divine conduct in bearing with the wicked to say, that the removal of them would disorder his government ; because we might reasonably expect, from the infinite wisdom of God, that the government he appoints should be such, in which he might execute justice without committing disorder. And doubtless, had God intended no other state for mankind than the present, the course of things in it would have been so ordered, that the wicked would have met with their due punishment in this life, without making the good partakers in it ; and a state, in which all was to be done here, and nothing left to be done hereafter, as it could not have admitted, so would not have required, such forbearance with the wicked, as we see in the present state.

God's

God's forbearance then with the wicked, rather than he will disorder his government of mankind by a removal of them, when considered with the appointment of another state after this, is right. For as, on the one hand, if there was no other state than the present, it would be reasonable, that God should conduct his government of mankind with a view to this state only; so, on the other hand, if there be another state, it will be as reasonable, that God should conduct his government of mankind, not only with a view to this state, but also with a view to what he intends in another to succeed it; there will then be no necessity, that all should be done here, and nothing left to be done hereafter; and if the state, in which God hath placed mankind at present, be such as necessarily requires, it is likewise such as will reasonably admit of, forbearance with the wicked in this life, upon an assurance, that they shall be dealt with according to their deserts in the next.

This vindicates the Divine conduct; for in this view the punishment due to the wicked is not denied, but deferred; and a delay of punishment is not, necessarily, a violation of justice; — on the contrary, where there are
reasonable

reasonable and wise purposes of government answered by such delay, it is an instance of the wise administration of it.

Now we can never be at a loss to know what wise purposes in God's government are answered by his forbearance with the wicked, when the same revelation, which declares, that it is the purpose of God to reward the good and punish the wicked in another life, does thereby expressly declare it to be the purpose of God, that the present life should be a state of trial; consequently, it will be reasonable, and answerable to the purposes of God's government over mankind, that he should deal with us in a manner suitable to a state of trial. — Now God's forbearance with wicked men among us is not only a suitable, but a necessary consequence of such a state.

For a state of trial implies frailty in those who are placed under it; and we all sensibly feel this to be really the case with us. If then God should be extreme to mark and to punish immediately what is amiss, who might abide it? — That would hardly be a state of trial, where destruction waits on the first offence. — If then some forbearance be ne-

cessary for the purpose of a state of trial, who shall prescribe how much is sufficient? — Besides, when God hath appointed this life for a state of probation, and the next for a state of judgment, it would be destroying his own appointments, should God in this life exert judgment without forbearance; such a conduct would not only be contrary to the purpose of a probation here, but would anticipate the purpose of a judgment hereafter.

When we consider ourselves as placed in a state of probation under the government of God, it is more natural for us, as well as more suitable to the purposes of such a state, to look for the tenderness of his mercy, rather than for the rigour of his justice. To set aside God's mercy, is as great an affront to his perfection, as to set aside his justice; both are attributes equally belonging to God; and, in a survey of his government, to consider only what suits the Divine justice, without considering too what suits his mercy, is judging wrong. Our present state of probation and duty is the proper province for God's mercy to exercise itself in; for, as the atonement of Christ has given an efficacy to man's repentance,

repentance, so the mercy of God, in his forbearance with wickedness, gives room for that repentance to work; and man, who would be too weak to stand, if justice should demand his destruction for the first offence, is enabled, by the forbearance which mercy affords, to recover himself, and, by returning to his duty, to recover the favour of God.

A wise governor will provide for the preservation of his subjects; God, who is infinitely wise, will most effectually provide for the preservation of his; and, as his wisdom has appointed, that we should work out our salvation in a state of trial, his mercy naturally and suitably exercises itself in that state, by giving us all reasonable assistance in our work; and, because, “when the night cometh no man can work,” his forbearance prolongs the day of the wicked, and gives him time to work.

Besides this, as a state of probation admits, not to say requires, encouragement, though it excludes reward—so the mercy of God, in his forbearance with the wicked, as it gives room for their repentance and better duty, gives them likewise encouragement to set about it, at the same time that it places their obedience

obedience on its only true principle—the love of God. A wise governor not only provides for the preservation of his subjects, but provides likewise the most natural and most durable foundation for their obedience. Every instance of God's forbearance with us leads us to love him, as every instance of his justice awakes our fear of him. Such conduct in the government of God is the result of his wisdom; for the wisdom of government is never more fully displayed, than by such methods of administration as tend to establish the obedience of the subject on the principle of love, as well as fear.

Thus our present state of probation and duty is the proper province for Divine mercy to exercise itself in, as the next state of reward and punishment is the proper province of Divine justice. The Divine perfections are all employed about man, but none of these perfections must obstruct the operations of another—nor will they, whilst each operates in its proper province, or no farther steps into the province of another, than only to co-operate with it. Thus, though our present state be the proper province for the mercy of God to shew itself in, yet is it not
so

so peculiarly appropriated to it, as wholly to exclude his justice.—That also claims room to shew itself here, yet not to thwart, but to co-operate with, his mercy—not to defeat, but to assist it.

For, in the course of human affairs, we see, as I observed in my last discourse, that God hath provided, that his forbearance with the wicked should not be such, as allows them their full growth without any check or controul. God hath given man a commission to inspect and cultivate his field; and this authority, which God hath deputed to man for the punishment of the wicked, is not a contradiction, but a supplement (and a useful one) to his own general rule of bearing with them; as it operates, by examples, for producing that repentance, which his forbearance proposes. This method of forbearance, in God's government, is proper, and cannot be prejudicial; because God is at all times able to controul the wickedness of men, to punish, as well as to forbear; nor can God extend his mercy too far for his power and justice to reach after it. But man, who is too weak for such an extensive power, must, for the support of *his* government, have a shorter extent appointed for the exercise of his

his mercy, and must be allowed to cut off immediately what would hereafter be too strong for his correction. For this reason, let no one understand the parable before us, as bearing hard upon the ordinary methods of human government, which cannot allow that forbearance, which the government of God admits; since human government could not subsist, if that did not remove offenders—and God's government will subsist, though he forbears with them. The immediate exercise, therefore, of justice in human government is suitable to our want of power and wisdom in providing for our security without it; and the forbearance of it in God's government is suitable to his infinity of power and wisdom which supports it.

To conclude. — Instead of making God's forbearance with the wicked, in this part of his government over us, an objection against his conduct, let us, as we ought, make it a reason for improving our own. Happy were it for us, if our behaviour was as suitable to the purpose of God's forbearance, as that forbearance is suitable to his wisdom. There is no part of God's conduct more fully set before us than his forbearance with sinners; we read it in every page of scripture, we see it, we feel

feel it, in every day's experience. The works of his eternal wisdom and power are often beyond our comprehension, but the works of his mercy are always open and intelligible — as if that was the lesson, which man is most concerned to know — and so it is — his frailty needs support and encouragement, and the mercy of God supplies him with the greatest — yet man abuses it, and, by neglecting to make a right use of the forbearance God allows him, applies those means for encreasing his condemnation, which are given him for avoiding it.

There is no need of argument, for proving the unreasonableness of this conduct — every man sees it, whenever he considers it — the case is, we do not consider it so often and so seriously as we should do. — This world engrosses our attention; we forget the purposes of God's forbearance, and, instead of applying the time allowed us in a serious repentance of what is past, and for our future amendment, we apply it in a licentious enjoyment of what is before us.

But let us seriously consider — that, however we may hide ourselves in the enjoyments of the world, the judgment of God will find us. — A day of retribution is fixed, and the

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certainty of it is not a stronger justification of God's forbearance, than it is a reason for our repentance; — at the same time that it silences our complaints against the sufferance of so much wickedness in the world, it loudly calls upon us to remove our share of it out of the way.

What time is fixed for the great day of retribution, God only knows — but this we all know, that to us the day of our death is the day of our retribution; — how near, or how distant that is, we cannot tell, and therefore we should be prepared for the nearest approach of it.

God grant us his grace, that we may all be speedily prepared! — that when the Son of Man shall send forth his angels, to separate the wicked from the good, we may be found among the righteous, and placed to shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of the Father!

S E R M O N LX.

THE SCRIPTURES, THE STAR WHICH
LEADETH TO CHRIST.

MATTHEW ii. 10.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

WE cannot read the account which the Evangelist gives of the wise men, who came from the east to Jerusalem upon the birth of Jesus, without feeling a reflection, which points at the shame of some Christians, as well as at the honour of these heathen sages. They took a long journey, to gratify themselves with the sight of an infant child, wrapt in swaddling cloaths, and lying in a manger. They brought with them rich offerings, which, upon approaching the child, they laid before him, expressing their worship of him. They were divinely conducted to

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the object of their adoration by a star, which when they saw they rejoiced with exceeding great joy, and with immediate alacrity followed its guidance, and with pious devotion laid themselves prostrate before the child Jesus.

Do Christians shew their joy and respect to Christ, under their knowledge of him, as these heathen sages shewed theirs in seeking and finding him?

God be thanked, there are many, very many, true and good Christians; but still there is too much reason to lament, that there are many, too many, who profess themselves Christians, and would resent it to be called, or even thought to be otherwise, who do not deserve that title, and, I may add, who do not desire it—who are indifferent about Christianity, if not malevolent against it. These have not had a long journey to come at Christ, for they set out in life with him—it is well if they have not taken a desperate journey to avoid him.

Indifference to the Christian religion is rather of modern growth;—when the Gospel first shewed itself to the world, and for some time after, men were either hearty friends, or virulent enemies, to it; the former being actuated by

by the force of recent evidence and conviction in its favour, the latter by ancient prejudice and recent distaste against it. Men had then nothing to lay hold of their attention, but what might be offered by its friends to prove and recommend it, or what might be offered by its enemies to disprove and disparage it. In process of time, as the world opened to mankind, they found other objects that called and laid hold of their attention—and, as they directed their attention to what the world could shew them, they withdrew it, both from what the friends of the Gospel could shew to recommend it, and from what its enemies could shew to disparage it. There hath been always this avocation, which has produced, and will continue to produce, a contest between the world and the Christian religion, which of them shall lay the fastest hold on our attention.—Without determining that the world had never greater advantage in this contest than at present, it may be said, that at present the world, and what belongs to it, has too much power in commanding our attention from Christ's Gospel, and the religion it sets before us;—and though it be true, that what the world shews us, in point of merit, stands no comparison with what the Christian religion

holds forth to us, yet, in point of effect, in proportion as we withdraw our attention from religion, and direct it to the world, it will make us indifferent to the former, as it fastens us to the latter; which is the more to be guarded against, because the transition from indifference to dislike, as experience shews us every day, is neither wide nor difficult.

The wise men, who came from the east to worship Christ at Jerusalem, were divinely conducted to him by a star.—So are mankind divinely directed to the Christian religion by the holy scriptures; those who, as did the wise men, rejoice in this star, will succeed, as did the wise men, and will find Christ. The scriptures are the word of God, and what more sure guidance to the Son of God, than the word of God? This then is our star, which we should not only rejoice to see, but we should attentively follow as it leads us. The information which the scriptures give us of God's conduct, and the direction they give us for our own conduct in consequence of it, are not only to be received, but they are to be regarded. We must not indulge the wicked, but too fashionable self-conceit, and persuade ourselves and others, that we can do very well without the scriptures. The wise men of the east

east were prompted by their star to set out, and were conducted by it, till they found Christ; but there are those in the west (not wise men, nor desirous of finding Christ) who set out of themselves, and, without being shewn the way, are confident that their own faculties will carry them where they ought to go, and where, though they find not Christ (whom they do not seek) yet they shall find happiness. Such men, instead of rejoicing, are rather sorry at seeing this star, and either will not look up to it at all, or will look at it through their own glasses, which diminish or distort it—will either not read the scriptures at all, or will read them with their own false comment and interpretation of them.

But men of sense and sobriety, who have more of religion than of vanity and self-conceit in them, rejoice in the scriptures and read them; and not only read them, but consider them; and from such consideration they both believe right, and they behave right, and so come before Christ, not with futile conceits, the trash of human philosophy, but with the faith and the practical virtues of a Christian—the gold, frankincense, and myrrh, which they have extracted from the scriptures.

Constant and devout reading the scriptures is the most natural and the most effectual prevention of that indifference to religion, which so much distinguishes the present age, as well as the most effectual cure of it, where it has laid hold upon us. God's government of mankind is there so very plainly and intelligibly set forth, his attributes of power, wisdom, and goodness, of justice and mercy, so fully exemplified in his management and his dispensations, his promises and his judgments so forcibly inculcated, that they cannot fail influencing our sentiments, and making us wiser when we read, or when we hear them; and when deliberately considered, they will influence our behaviour, and make us not only wiser but better men. Christ's redemption and salvation of mankind, is there so plainly and effectually set forth, that we cannot read the Evangelists' account of it, and be indifferent whether we shall hereafter be eternally happy or otherwise. We cannot there read the history of Christ's love and care for us, his works, his precepts, his promises, and his manner of life and conversation here, without wishing we may be entitled to know more of him hereafter, by a suitable life and manner of conversation of our own, and, as far as we can
carry

carry it, by an imitation of the great example he hath set us.

But if men, instead of reading the scriptures, will not so much as admit the hearing them; if, besides their never opening them at home, they contemptuously, or on idle avocations, shun the opportunities they have of being acquainted with them at church; if, instead of improving their religious sentiments by the word of God, they will hang over the pages of fantastical writers, for improving their taste (as they tell us) but for corrupting it (as we too often see) — they may thus very soon contract that indifference to Christ's religion, as will lead by easy steps to a dislike of it, and still farther on, by no difficult steps, to an enmity against it.

It is to this sort of mismanagement we may impute that indifference to religion which prevails, though not universally, yet much too generally, among us. It is true, vice will work this effect; yet, living with indifference to Christ's religion, is more extensive than living viciously — and folly as often breeds that indifference as vice does. The several kinds of folly which produce this mischief are too many, and too improper, to be held up from this place. That folly, however, which is the

most productive of this mischief, and the least improper for the preacher to mention, is the folly of being above going to church—above attending the public religious assemblies, where they may worship God, and keep up their acquaintance with his scriptures;—a privilege, and a duty this, which is intended for all ranks of people, but it seems now devolved to the lower; and they, if they cannot imitate the upper ranks in any thing else, can imitate them in neglecting the church.

They who follow business excuse themselves (but seldom ask themselves whether God will excuse them) for being otherwise engaged. Their business may be proper, and their engagement in it may be a duty; but their being so constantly engaged in it, that they cannot, or, more truly, that they will not, ever look at religion, is not a duty, but a fault, and not only a grievous, but an absurd fault;—if their eternal happiness depends upon their attention to Christ's religion, and if such attention promotes, not hinders, their temporal success, and their true enjoyment of it.

As to those who follow, not their business, but their pleasure, they will hardly venture even to excuse themselves for paying no attention to religion; and, what is worse, they will
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hardly be able to extricate themselves from the indifference they have contracted. Business, proper business, properly followed, has room for religious thoughts; but pleasures, which from their mutual connection with each other become various, soon become improper, and, when excessively pursued, leave no room for religious thoughts.

The holy scriptures then are our star, not for leading us, as the Magi were led, to find Christ, but for leading us to the keeping him. We are not strangers, but are born and bred up under him; and the offerings we are to make him in our prostration before him, are not the produce of a foreign country, but the produce of our own breasts — our heart and affections; our heart full of faith in him, and our affections made up of love, praise, and obedience. This, if sincerely offered, Christ will accept, and not only accept, but reward; will reward it with his grace and protection through this state of duty here, to a state of glory and eternal happiness in his heavenly kingdom hereafter.

S E R M O N LXI.

PRUDENCE AND DILIGENCE THE NATURAL ROAD TO SUCCESS.

PROVERBS xvi. 20.

*He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good ;
and whoſo truſteth in the Lord, happy is he.*

THE two beſt guides a man can have through life, are *prudence* and *religion* ; the one ſets him at work with his own abilities, the other teaches him to truſt in God. We are ſo made, and ſo placed, that, after uſing our beſt abilities, we muſt truſt ſomewhere elſe for ſucceſs—nay, even for the application of our abilities ; and look where we will, we can find none, on whom we can better truſt, than God ; his infinite perfections of wiſdom, goodneſs, and power, demand, and warrant, our truſt in him ; and, ſolicitous as we are in ſeeking friends among mankind, who
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are scarce to be found, and hardly to be trusted, it is strange we are so apt as we are to overlook that friend, who is always ready at hand, and always to be depended on.

But then our trust in God not only admits, but demands, the use of our own prudence and diligence, without which, to trust in God is to affront him ; it is treating God as if he was our provider only, to feed and to protect us, and not our governor, who hath set us to work. God hath set each man to work in the station which he hath thought fit to appoint, and with natural abilities suitable to his station, which he may improve by use, or spoil by neglect, and so may either attain or miss the happiness belonging to his station ; and when the latter is the case, that men lose the good belonging to their station through their own folly or neglect, I see not how they can justify any more than they can relieve themselves, by pleading that they trust in God—or why they should think a trust in God is a useless duty, because they are thus disappointed.

The better care men take of their natural abilities, by a diligent application of them, the more wisely will they handle the matters belonging to their station and duty, and the more likely

likely will they be to find good, i. e. to find success in their business. This is the obvious and plain meaning of my text.

We see indeed the ignorant and slothful often meeting with a success which they deserve not; but, as ignorance and sloth are manifestly not the cause of their success, no one should imitate their manners, to come at their success; which they have not wrought for themselves, but which is set before them by a hand they think not of, and for purposes they are not aware of;—for, as “God sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust,”—on the latter, not *because* they are unjust, but *although* they are so—so he sets success before the unworthy, making use of them as instruments in his dispensations—or, to shew his absolute power, in giving to whom he pleases;—at the same time teaching us not to depend on what we cannot command, and not to set too great a value on those things, or on ourselves for having them, which may be given to the most worthless among us.

Yet, notwithstanding these instances, prudence and diligence are the natural road to success in the various business of life. It must be so, unless we could suppose that God, who hath made nothing to be useless, has made
man

man to be idle, and given him understanding, sagacity, and ingenuity to no purpose ;—on the contrary, God hath set forth his own work to employ the work of man ; and it is the most proper expression of our trust in God, when we apply those abilities for coming at success in the business of life, which God hath given us for that purpose.

It is true, success may not infallibly follow such application.—As God hath given us our several abilities, it is doubtless his will that we should employ them—why else were they given ? and that, when employed, they should ordinarily lead up to success—else, what encouragement in employing them ?—but there is no reason to presume or expect it as God's will, that whenever they are employed they shall always be successful ; because this would be giving up too much of his government into the hands of men, by subjecting human events to their will ; which, to keep up their dependence on him, and his authority over them, should be always subject to his own. For this reason, we should acquiesce in such disappointment, and not take occasion from it of complaining against Providence, or of neglecting our abilities and diligence as useless, because they are not successful.—Complaints
against

against Providence in this case are wrong, because we may be well assured, that God has reasons, and the wisest, for every step in his dispensations; which reasons he may either totally conceal, or, as he often does, may hereafter discover to us in the sequel of events. In the former case, we have no reason to complain; — for what right have we to the counsels of God? — In the latter case we have reason to confess the superiority of his goodness and wisdom, above our own, when, as is often the case, we see our disappointments ripening into blessings. But when such disappointments make us impatient, so as to throw up our duty, in despite of Providence, to neglect our abilities and diligence as useless, because they are not successful — this is wicked and absurd; as if, because we succeed not yet, we therefore never can succeed; or, because we find not the good we aim at, we therefore are to find none. — Must we then have success in our own way, and at our own time? or else will we be sullen with Providence, and suffer the gifts he has endowed us with to rot unemployed, or employ them against him? — But what if abilities and diligence, constantly applied, should prove always and every where unsuccessful? — What even

then !—will we trust God no farther than we can feel him ?—What if, through the whole course of this short life, there be those who are successful without work, and those who work without being successful, shall we not trust God for another and a better life after this ? where every one will be rewarded, not according to the success he has met with in this life, but according to the work he has done in it ; where our want of success here shall heighten our reward, and unearned blessings shall be brought to a severe account.

But, without looking to the next life for a remedy to this malady, may we not find the cause of it within the limits of the present ? and may we not, by removing the cause of our disappointments, put ourselves more in the way of coming at success ?—Our trust in God requires other attendant virtues, besides a diligent and prudent use of our own abilities ;—without this, indeed, our trust in God will signify nothing, but even with it we may fall short of success.

For, besides the application of our own prudence and diligence in the business of life allotted us, there is requisite an obedience to God's will and commands ; under whose government we are placed here, and to whose judgment we are

accountable hereafter; which consideration suggests not only a compliance with what God hath thought fit to appoint in his government of the world about us, but an obedience to what he hath commanded us in our government and conduct of ourselves.—This we are very apt to overlook.—Men may feel themselves endued with sufficient abilities of prudence for the work and duty of their station in life, and they may exert a diligent application of such abilities;—they may feel religion enough to own God's government of the world, and, where events succeed to their wishes, will thank his goodness; and, where they do not, will acquiesce in the appointments of his power, which they cannot controul, and will sit down persuaded, that the disappointments they meet with can no more be accounted for, than they can be opposed;—but religion should carry us a step farther than all this;—and, would we follow it, would lead us to suspect, oft-times to discover, that what we think lies deep in the wisdom of God, may be found in our own folly; and the disappointment we labour under, may be no more than our desert.

If reason tells us we ought not to trust for favour where we shew neglect, religion must

be heard, when that tells us, that our trust in God should be attended with a study of pleasing him by a ready obedience in all things to his will.—Man should always direct *his* conduct by observing this rule; though Providence does not always direct *his* conduct by man's transgressing it, but, in promoting the general purposes of his government, often confers particular blessings on those whose behaviour towards him does not deserve it; yet, notwithstanding this, God may, and doubtless does, withhold or confer particular blessings on men according to their behaviour towards him;—for though this life be not intended for a state of final recompence, yet it may well admit, not to say it necessarily requires, temporary encouragements of goodness, and temporary discouragements of wickedness;—else, distant hopes and fears would hardly keep us to our duty. If this be the case, we may solve many apparent difficulties in the dispensations of Providence, would we but examine (I do not say each other's conduct, but) our own hearts. Under an examination of this kind, strictly and impartially pursued, we might cease to complain of Providence, when we meet not with success, though we have used our best diligence under a full trust in his goodness; if
we

we find, that our diligence was employed to serve, not God, but ourselves — perhaps to feed and gratify some inordinate passion ; — if we find that we had no right to trust in his goodness and favour, as we were so far from studying to please him, that it was never in our thoughts, which were wholly employed in the pursuit of what must highly offend him.—If, in their particular expectances from Providence, men would seriously ask themselves, whether they deserve what they expect, or whether they would use it, if granted, to his honour and pleasure ? it might serve to regulate their trust in God, and abate the pain of the disappointment in their want of success.

This question brings along with it another, as useful ; — Whether what we expect or wish for be fit for us ? — We are all very apt to think we deserve more than we do ; and to think ourselves fit for any good we can reach, or which may befall us, in life. With these thoughts about us, was there no wise Governor above us, it is easy to imagine, what a scene of mischief and confusion this world would be ; but, having a Governor above us, of infinite goodness, wisdom, and power, it is as easy to conclude, that, though there are

what seem to be irregularities in the world, yet every thing is in its right place, and every person in his right office ; for, unless we will deny there is a God, we must allow, that the wisdom, which governs the whole system, knows where and to what purpose he should place each individual, better than each individual knows — and places him accordingly.

And this points at another requisite attendant on our trust in God, which is submission to his appointments, with a persuasion that, whatever they be, they are best for us. — Submit we must, to God's appointments, our duty lies not in that ; the consideration of his power holds our hands, but not always our thoughts ; — there lies our work — so to regulate and direct our thoughts, that they may lead the mind up to a satisfactory persuasion, that the condition, in which we find ourselves, is a right one. To set the thoughts in this train, nothing is more effectual, than the consideration of God's infinite wisdom and goodness ; — for, however difficult it may be to persuade ourselves, that men are either wise or good, when they deny us what we wish for, or make us feel what we dislike, yet, when God does this, the sentiment differs — as much as God differs from man. We may well

well distaste and suspect what comes from the imperfect wisdom and goodness of man, which are so very imperfect, that they scarce deserve the name; — but, what comes from Perfection itself, if we think at all, must give us satisfaction.

It may seem strange to talk of satisfaction, whilst we are uneasy, whether it be in what we want, or in what we suffer; but our religion may, and must, remove this uneasiness — else our reason, which distinguishes us from inferior creatures, will afford us but a painful pre-eminence above them; — they are satisfied where Providence has placed them — if they are so, because, their faculties being confined to their station, they neither see or think beyond it, what do we gain by our superior faculties in seeing and thinking farther, if those faculties only serve to make us uneasy with what we are? Our faculties are given us, indeed, for looking forward, and, by the help of religion, for looking upward — even to heaven and happiness; and this view, if we fix our attention upon it, will give us satisfaction, as it shews us what we are designed for (if we do not frustrate the design), and that, wherever Providence thinks fit to place us here, it is in our way to heaven, one con-

dition as well as another—which, being all of God's appointment, must be wisely appointed, and, being intermediate appointments, they suggest this comfort, even under the worst circumstances belonging to them—that they are but of short continuance, and, if well discharged, have happiness laying close behind them.

In the mean time, let us always remember, that every state of life has its happiness (if we may call it so) belonging to it—except a state of affliction—and even that is not, ordinarily, without its comforts;—and every state of life, besides its proper happiness, has too its proper duties belonging to it; a diligent and discreet discharge of which, with a trust in God, and our honest endeavours to please him, is the sure way for coming at the happiness belonging to our present station;—and, if it be not always a sure way to our advancement in a better (which it often is), it most certainly entitles us to the favour of God;—a sense of which will make the mind easy in any condition, and, without this sense, no condition whatever can make us happy.

SERMON

S E R M O N L X I I .

ON THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S
SUPPER.

LUKE xxii. 19.

This do, in remembrance of me.

AS the approaching festival calls us to the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, you will give me leave to offer you some considerations on this, which is the most solemn duty of Christian devotion.

This sacred rite was instituted, as we all know, by our Lord himself, immediately before his death ; and, though it was instituted in the presence of his apostles only, yet no one will doubt, but it is directed to the use of all Christians — unless the blessings of Christ's death, and the religion built upon a faith in them, can be supposed to belong to the apostles only ; and unless we can suppose, that St.
Paul

Paul is trifling with the Corinthians, when he is directing them in the use of a duty, with which they had no concern. Nor is it *directed* only, but *enjoined*; for the apostle's expression, "As often as ye eat this bread and *" drink this cup,"* does not leave it as matter of choice, whether they used this rite or not; but, taking the necessity of the duty for granted, as founded on Christ's express command — "Do this" — gives it as matter of direction how they should apply themselves to it answerably to the design for which it was instituted; which was to shew, or commemorate, "the Lord's death till he come;" which implies too, that it is a duty of general extent to all times, as well as to all Christians.

1. Had Christ instituted this rite in remembrance of him, only as our teacher or a prophet, it had been a reasonable institution, and those who reverence his doctrine would observe such memorial; but the remembrance Christ enjoins implies more, as Christ did more, and is expressly directed to his sufferings and death, and the benefits we derive from thence. At the institution of this rite, Christ brake the bread, and giving it to his disciples, said, "Take, eat, this is my body, which is given for you; do this in remembrance"

of his death for you

“brance of me;” and when he gave the cup he said, “This is my blood, which is shed for you, for the remission of sins;” plainly declaring his death, and the benefits of it, to be the object of their remembrance, and as plainly declaring what those benefits were. It is so obvious to common sense, that by these expressions Christ appointed the use of bread and wine only as symbols or representations of his sufferings and death, that the Papists’ interpretation of them, as meaning the real body and blood of Christ, is too absurd to deserve refuting; and, as absurdities generally lead to worse mischief, so the Papists’ transubstantiation has led them to gross idolatry, to worship those elements as Christ, which are no more than the means of remembering him. Nor is this remembrance of Christ’s death appointed, merely as an honourable memorial of him, but that we should constantly remember the great foundation on which we build our religion and our salvation; for thus the matter stands — without remission of sins there can be no salvation; without satisfaction for sins there can be no remission of them; Christ made that satisfaction by his death — therefore Christ’s death must
constantly

constantly be remembered, as the principle on which we must proceed in the religion which he hath left us.

Christ placed not his institution of the sacrament upon the reason, on which benefactors here appoint a memorial of their services—to perpetuate a name and to preserve their glory;—but he had conferred a benefit on mankind, which would only prove such upon their proper application of it, and, well knowing the frailty of our natures, he judged it proper to appoint a method, which, by calling us frequently to the remembrance of the benefit, might be a means of putting us to a proper application of it; his care for us extended beyond his continuance upon earth, when he thus left us an appointment to support us in our duty.

We cannot indeed, nor ought we, to set ourselves to the remembrance of Christ's death, and the benefits we derive from it, without hearts full of praise and thanksgiving, to God who freely gave his Son, and to Christ who freely offered himself for us: such sentiments, though they are not the *end* of Christ's appointment, are the natural *consequence* of it, and are not only due to God and our Redeemer,

deemer, but useful to ourselves, as they are a good means of leading us to make a right use, of what so much deserves our thanks.

2. But, besides the remembrance of Christ's death, and the benefits derived from it, there is a farther end and design in the use of this sacrament, as it carries a public testimony of our communion with Christ.

This communion with Christ, however, we must not think consists merely and solely in eating and drinking at his table; this too is but a symbol or external representation of an internal and more important communion with him—by a sincere faith in him, and obedience to his laws, on our part; and receiving from him the benefit of his redemption, in a pardon of our sins (many of which will be found under the best obedience), and his assisting grace, which the strongest will stand in need of, in keeping him attentive to the promises and duties which lead to the heaven he has opened for us by his death. This is the communion we have with Christ—our faith, his blessings, in this state of duty, till we arrive at a more exalted communion with him in a state of glory.

Every good Christian is studious to maintain

tain this communion with Christ at home, and in his closet; but it is his duty to give public testimony of this communion in the church, because Christ hath commanded it, and because the giving such public testimony of his communion with Christ, is useful both to himself and others. The redemption Christ wrought by his death, he wrought for all mankind; and the religion, which is built upon a faith in this redemption, is in due time to go through all mankind. This religion, which at first set out under the miraculous hand of God, is now left to proceed on human means, yet still under the same Divine protection. Therefore Christ set up his church, a visible society of his followers, for the preservation and propagation of his religion: into this church we are admitted by the sacrament of Baptism, and declare our faithful continuance in it by the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, where we meet to give public testimony of our communion with Christ, thereby confirming our own faith, encouraging the faith of others, and contributing to the preservation and promotion of Christ's religion through the world.

3. There is yet a farther end and design in the

the use of this sacrament, as it carries a public testimony not only of our communion with Christ, but also of our Christian union; an union in the same faith and obedience to Christ, and mutual charity one with another.

When Christ set up his church, for the preservation and promotion of his religion in the world, he did not lay aside his attention to it, but, seated as he is at God's right hand, continually inspects and governs it. Thus is his church here on earth a body, or society, over which he presides as head. As this shews us the advantage and honour of our Christian situation, so it shews us the necessity, that, being all members of one body under one head, we should maintain and express one and the same faith in Christ, who is our head; and that, being members of the same body, there should be that fit disposition in each of us to our several functions, and that agreement of each with all, which we observe in the natural body, and which every society requires for the good government of it, and for obtaining the end and design for which it is instituted. And this mutual union, in order to be maintained, must be expressed, or visibly set forth; for
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though we can each of us have, and know that we have, a faith in Christ, without expressing it, we cannot know that many have the same faith unless they join in some expression that testifies such union. This union in the same faith we testify, by meeting to partake of that bread and wine, which Christ hath commanded to be used as symbols of his body and blood, as by this act all present are understood to declare their faith in the benefits of his death.

And this public joint expression and testimony of our all holding the same faith in Christ's salvation, as it is essentially necessary to the very being of Christ's church (for indeed this is what constitutes a church) so is it farther useful, as a means for setting us to the duties belonging to such faith, or to such church. For, our salvation by Christ being conditionally offered to us, on the terms of our obedience, whoever declares his faith in this salvation, confesses the necessity of the terms on which it stands; and though our private reflections may convince us of this, yet when we publicly appear at the Lord's table, to partake of the bread and wine as representations of his body and blood, by thus declaring each our faith in the salvation wrought

wrought in his death, we renew our engagement to live as becomes it, and pledge ourselves to each other for the performance of it; nor is there a more natural connection, than that, whilst we are joining in the remembrance of Christ's love towards us, we should be reminded of the love we owe to one another, as the loving those whom Christ loves is the most proper return we can make for his loving us.

Such is the end and design of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.—An institution founded on such authority, and for such purposes, certainly demands our suitable regard; and, as it ought not to be neglected, so we may well suppose it requires a suitable preparation of mind in our use of it. This part of my subject I shall reserve for the next opportunity,

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S E R M O N LXIII.

The same Subject continued.

I. CORINTHIANS xi. 28.

*Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat
of that bread, and drink of that cup.*

ST. Paul in this chapter reproves the Corinthians for several irregularities in their religious assemblies; one of which was their profaning the Lord's Supper by an indecent and intemperate behaviour at the celebration of it. This profanation arose from a circumstance, which in those times belonged to the method of celebrating the Lord's Supper, but which is wholly laid aside among us. In those times the celebration of the Sacrament was attended with a common feast, where the rich and the poor feasted together at the same table. These were called Love-feasts, because

on these occasions they testified and confirmed their mutual love by a liberal collation of the rich to help the poor. This feast, in the time of the Apostles, and for some time after, was previous to the celebration of the Sacrament, in imitation of our Saviour's institution, who celebrated the Sacrament after supper; and St. Paul taxes the Corinthians with this particular irregularity, that at this feast, when they came together for the Lord's Supper, they did not tarry one for another, but every one took his own supper, and one was hungry, and another was drunken.

It was this irregularity among the Corinthians which gave occasion to St. Paul's advice; in which he tells them, that by behaving so indecently when they met together for the Sacrament, they profanely perverted the end for which it was instituted. It was instituted, he tells them, for celebrating the Lord's death — “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink
“ this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he
“ come;” and therefore to make use of it without a view to this end, and only as an occasion for discord and intemperance; was not treating the Holy Sacrament with that reverence which was due to it—it was treating it unworthily, and such unworthy treatment of
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the Sacrament shewed a want of that proper discernment or distinction which belongs to the body and blood of the Lord; and carried in it the guilt of profaning it—a guilt which, the Apostle says, exposed them to God's chastisements; of which, it seems, they had examples among them—"for this cause," says he, "many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep"—that is, are taken off by death. These divine chastisements our English translation renders by the word "damnation," somewhat improperly, for this word, in common usage, signifies the eternal punishments of the next life;—but the Apostle meant no such matter. What is rendered "damnation," St. Paul calls *judgment*; and that the judgment he speaks of was temporal only, and not relative to the eternal punishments of the next life, is plain, because the judgment he speaks of, he expressly says, was directed to save them from future condemnation.

The Apostle therefore advises the Corinthians to approach the Sacrament, not through previous disorder and intemperance, but with sobriety and serious consideration. "Let a man examine himself;" let him reflect on the nature and design of the duty he is about, and prepare his heart with a suitable disposition for performing

forming it:—such reflection will lead him to the Sacrament with that veneration which worthily belongs to it, and will secure him from those chastisements which are to be feared from treating it unworthily.

The compilers of our liturgy did right in laying the exhortation to the Sacrament on this passage in St. Paul's writings, as it not only contains his advice against profaning it, but shews an example of the danger of such behaviour. It is true, we are not in the way of committing that particular profanation of the Sacrament, for which the Apostle blames the Corinthians, because we have not those feasts attending the Sacrament which they had; but we may approach it irreverently; we may apply ourselves to it when we are unfit to partake of it; in which cases we are guilty of profaning it, and expose ourselves to the displeasure of God in so doing.—But what the compilers of the liturgy have rightly applied, some have not so rightly understood. They are afraid, and very justly, of profaning the Sacrament; but they do not justly discern and distinguish what is profaning the Sacrament; they form notions about the unworthiness and unsuitness of receiving it, which neither St. Paul, nor the compilers of the liturgy,

turgy, ever thought of; and, by an unreasonable fear of profaning the Sacrament, are led into, what is as bad, a total neglect of it.

They are so frightened, or pretend so to be, with the passage which threatens damnation, that they do not attend to what immediately follows it — 'repent ye truly for your sins — past — have a lively and steadfast faith in Christ our Saviour — amend your lives — and be in perfect charity with all men — so shall ye be meet partakers of those holy mysteries.' — These are the qualifications which the church sets forth, as preparatory to the Sacrament; faith—repentance—and an amendment of our lives; and these qualifications the church enjoins, because, in truth, they necessarily arise from the very end and design of the Sacrament; for if the Sacrament offers us a pardon of our sins by the means of Christ's body and blood, it is plain we cannot, with any propriety, approach to accept that offer, but with a faith and trust in the efficacy of those means; nor can we, with any propriety, ask pardon of our sins, but under a sincere repentance of them; nor is there any propriety in a repentance, which is not attended, at least, with a resolution of amendment.

With respect then to a preparation for the Sacrament, or the making ourselves fit to partake of it, we have first to ask ourselves—Have we faith and trust in the benefit of Christ's death?—that it was intended, and is effectual, for procuring our salvation, on complying with the terms of faith and repentance, on which that benefit is offered to us. It is reasonably to be presumed, that every Christian, as such, is furnished with this qualification; for he is no Christian, although baptised, who has not this faith; and every man can feel whether he has it or not; if he has it, he is so far qualified for the Sacrament; if he has it not, he certainly is not fit to come there; for, as he renounces the *benefit* of Christ's death, he has nothing to do with the *duties* which arise from it.

We have next to reflect how we have lived;—and if we discover any failures in those duties which we owe to God, our neighbour, or ourselves, we can feel whether we are sorry for them, and sincerely wish them to be forgiven; or, whether we reflect upon them with indifference, and are careless about a pardon for them. If we feel the former disposition, our repentance is so far right; if we feel the latter disposition, we have no business at the Sacrament;

ment; for why should we apply for pardon of our sins, when we are not desirous of it? If we carry this disposition with us to the Lord's table, we are doubtless guilty of affronting it; for what do we when we come there? We solemnly ask pardon for our sins upon our repentance.—If then we have not that repentance, what is it but mockery? On the other hand—when we carry with us a sincere repentance, we carry what we are directed to bring thither, and are so far worthy of partaking.

To repent and be sorry for past sins, is no difficult matter; but the difficulty lies in acting suitably to such repentance; and this is the point at which we may be apt to stick, in our examination of ourselves for the Sacrament. Our faith, we feel, is right, our repentance real, but the amendment of our lives uncertain.

Here then let us ask ourselves,

Whether, as we feel a repentance for our sins, so we do not feel a resolution of endeavouring to avoid them for the future? If we *do not* feel this, we have great reason to suspect the sincerity of our repentance; if we *do* feel this, we have no reason to be afraid of the Sacrament. The actual amendment of life must be a work of time; and he who has
laid

laid a proper foundation for it, by a sincere resolution of pursuing it, does all that is at present within his power, and may safely approach the Lord's table.

But is this all?—Is there no more required of Christians, to prepare them for the Sacrament, than that they should have faith in the merits of Christ's death—repent of their sins—and resolve to be obedient for the future?—This every Christian is obliged to do, whether he goes to the Sacrament or not.

And true it is, that the Sacrament imposes no new duty upon Christians, but is a declaration—a solemn one indeed—of the covenant we made with Christ when we were baptized;—so that the being afraid to make such declaration of our baptismal covenant with Christ, looks like being sorry that we are Christians; and if, in consequence of this fear, we totally withdraw ourselves from the Sacrament, we positively renounce Christ and his institutions; which, though it touches not those who care not for Christ, must shake those who wish to be saved by him.

But there is a material question still behind. Can a Christian, with any decent confidence, approach the Lord's table, after breach of former resolutions, to make new ones, which may not be more durable?

Here

Here lies the point. — And I would not be misunderstood in speaking to it. I would relieve the scrupulous in what may deter them from the *use* of the Sacrament, but should be loth to do it so, as may encourage the *abuse* of it.

Christ instituted the Sacrament for our benefit; and when St. Paul, in his recounting this institution, says, “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup,” he implies a frequent *use* of it. — Why, but for the frequent *want* we have for it? — For the truth is, that, to keep our attention steady to the religion Christ hath set us, we want frequent calls to the remembrance of his death, on which that religion is built; — and such is our weakness in a steady discharge of our duty, that we have frequent need of assistance, and therefore want frequent recourse to those means of assistance, by strengthening and refreshing our souls, which we derive from a proper use of the Sacrament. For a devout recollection of our Christian religion, and of our Christian duty belonging to it, is a natural and effectual means of exciting us, and keeping us up to, a constant and regular observance of it; because a compliance with Christ's ordinances puts us in the way of those
promises

promises of communicating his Holy Spirit, which he hath annexed to them, and which he dispenses infallibly, however imperceptibly. —The failure then of former obedience, or the apprehension of future weakness, in steadily acting up to our present good resolutions, is so far from being a reason against coming to the Sacrament, that it is a reason, and a very strong one, for our having recourse to it—provided we are not deficient in that faith, repentance, charity, and resolution of amendment, which should qualify us for the use of it.

But then we must remember, that though repentance, and serious resolutions of amendment, are a sufficient preparation for the Sacrament, yet something more is expected from us in consequence of our attending it. —Not that the Sacrament imposes any new duties upon us, but it adds a fresh obligation for our performance of those which are already and originally incumbent upon us. With respect to our discharge of which, and the regular tenor of our future conduct, it will make a very material difference, whether we retire from the Sacrament with a serious resolution of avoiding new opportunities of sinning, or whether we have only occasionally recollected

recollected and asked pardon for our sins, and return back to the world to take them up again. — The former disposition will carry us greatly forward in a discharge of our duty, and will make us fitter objects of Christ's mercy in any accidental failures of it; whilst the latter makes us incorrigible and unpardonable, and is a great abuse of the Sacrament; which, though it is intended to support us under our frailties, is not intended to encourage us under a wilful and constant disobedience.

Perfect duty from imperfect creatures is what Christ doth not expect; and accidental failures of duty after the Sacrament, are neither unpardonable nor irrecoverable. But a resolute course of disobedience is what Christ hath forbid; and the pursuit of it under a frequent use of the Sacrament carries in it the worst affront to him, and the worst mischief to ourselves. It profanes an institution, which our Redeemer hath appointed in remembrance of the greatest instance of his love to man — and hardens us against the most animating and effectual means for carrying us through obedience to Christ here, to eternal happiness with him in his kingdom of heaven hereafter.

S E R M O N LXIV.

The same Subject continued,

I CORINTHIANS xi. 28,

Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

TH E R E are three sorts of men, to whom I would direct what I have offered on the subject of the Sacrament.

1. The first are those who totally neglect it.

If they neglect it because they despise it, let them consider the authority on which it is commanded, and the design with which Christ instituted it; and, if they be really the Christians they profess themselves, let them seriously reflect how they will answer a total neglect of it.

If

If they can satisfy themselves in the neglect of a duty which is calculated for their benefit, they will hardly be able to satisfy Christ, when he shall call them to account for neglecting a duty, which he hath commanded, and which he appointed in remembrance of his love to man, and the salvation he wrought for him by his death, — Is the authority of Christ to be despised? or is his love to man, and the salvation he has wrought for him, so insignificant, that it deserves not our remembrance? — They who totally neglect the Sacrament, and yet profess themselves Christians, dare not ask themselves these questions; — how then will they stand the enquiry, when Christ shall ask them from his tribunal? — Christ instituted but two sacraments, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord; both stand on the same authority, and on the same general reason of our salvation by Christ. Let me then ask those who totally neglect the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, supposing their parents had not taken care for their baptism, whether they would now refuse to be baptised? If they would not refuse it, let them consider, that the same reasons which would lead

lead them to the font, call them to the communion table; and that if they turn away from the latter, in defiance of these reasons, able as they are now to judge of them, they do, in effect, renounce what was done for them at their baptism by others, when they were not able to judge for themselves.

If men neglect the Sacrament because they are afraid of it, let them impartially examine from whence arises that fear. If they are afraid of offending God by coming to it unprepared, let them ask themselves why they think they are unprepared. If it is because they feel that disposition, those purposes to sin, which the Sacrament calls upon them to lay aside — let them remember, that this is a condition of mind which will condemn them, though they never partake of the Lord's Supper, and that, though they certainly should not go with such disposition about them, they are still guilty in neglecting the Sacrament, so long as they neglect to make themselves fit for receiving it. But if men do not feel such disposition, or such purposes, for sin, but are heartily resolved against those failures in

duty, of which they sincerely repent ; and yet are afraid to come—their fears are groundless.

When Christ invites them to come to his table with faith, repentance, and a sincere desire and resolution of future obedience, their suspicions are undutiful, if they think he will reject them so prepared. If they are afraid of offending God, by falling into sin after the Sacrament, and therefore keep away from it, let them consider—was our obedience to Christ's command, in partaking of the Sacrament, matter of free choice, we might be at liberty in declining those resolutions, preparatory to it, which we are doubtful of fulfilling ; but Christ demands our obedience, as to all his commands, so to this particular command of commemorating his death by receiving of the Sacrament, and it is our indispensable duty to resolve on such behaviour as is necessary to qualify us for the use of it ; and, frail as our resolutions are, yet, considering the merciful proposals of Christ, with respect to our imperfect obedience, that Christian has a much better title to Christ's favour, who shews his inclination to obey him, by frequently

quently renewing his good resolutions, than he, who shews his contempt of him by never making any at all.

2. Another sort of men, who are concerned in this subject, are those, who are careless in the use of the Sacrament, and attend it without those sentiments of religious and Christian devotion which necessarily belong to it.

Such should consider the nature and design, as well as the authority of this duty; to which Christ calls us, that we may give public testimony of our faith in his salvation, and of our engagement to live as that requires us. So solemn a duty naturally demands reverence and true Christian devotion in the performance of it; and, it is to be hoped, is generally so performed. For, as men are left to their free choice in the use of the Sacrament, it is reasonable to presume, that when any one voluntarily chooses to join in it, he does it upon proper motives, and with suitable and pious sentiments.

Yet there are particular cases, where men are enjoined this duty by human authority — as where the law requires them to receive the Sacrament in testimony of their being

in communion with the established church, and professing the same Christian religion which that sets forth. In which cases, though the command does not compel, but leaves full room for free choice in the act of communicating, and presumes, that men communicate not only voluntarily, but religiously, yet some may take their motives for doing it only from the command they are under, without seeking any from the duty itself; and they may communicate, not because they resolve to be good men, and would declare themselves to be true Christians, and of the Church established among us, but because they are serving their worldly interest, and qualifying themselves for some lucrative appointment.

Under the influence of which motive only many may come very ill prepared to this most solemn act of Christian devotion, and may advance to partake of Christ's body and blood with no more religion than when they go to some office to subscribe their name. — This is a profane abuse of the holy Sacrament; but it is not the authority enjoining the duty, that is chargeable with this abuse, but those who comply with the
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the duty upon wrong motives and without religion. The authority does nothing wrong, or too much, when it requires a good action of us as a proof, or test, that we are good men; but he does too little, who, when he is called upon to do a good action, does it upon no other principle than because he is called upon — and acts very wickedly when he thus prostitutes the most solemn act of Christian devotion merely to worldly motives, and means only to make his advantage of what he really despises. — They who are hardy enough to do this, to affront Christ at his own table, by pretending to honour him without thinking of him — to ask him for a pardon of those sins, which they are not sorry for — or to tell him they are sorry for those sins, which, so far from having formed a resolution of laying aside, they are still determined to keep — those, I say, who are hardy enough to do this — to qualify for a place — (if they ever think religiously) should consider our Saviour's question — “What will it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” — And let them take heed, lest, while they are qualifying for a place, they do not disqualify themselves for heaven.

3. A third sort of men, who are concerned in this subject, are those, who, under a due sense of the authority and nature of the Sacrament, and of their obligation to attend it, are somewhat superstitious in their advances to it, and think themselves not fit to communicate unless they have first gone through a prescribed form of preparation, which, because they have not had time to do, they keep away from the Sacrament, though in all other respects they are well qualified to communicate.

It is great pity when superstition mixes itself with religion, to disturb the conduct, and poison the comfort of it, and what makes this a difficult, as well as a pitiable, case, is, that in attempting to extract the one, there is danger of hurting the other. Faith, repentance, and sincere good purposes, are sufficient qualifications for the due receiving the Sacrament; yet preparation may be necessary for getting at these qualifications; and it depends on the different tempers, conditions, and situations of men, how much preparation, how long time, or what kind of preparation and assistance must be applied in order to be furnished with them. Men of serious and devout tempers,

tempers, and regular lives, are always fit for the Sacrament; but the gay, and especially the licentious, will have more to do to make themselves ready. Such must get out of the pleasures of sin, and take some pains to reflect, before they can feel what may properly be called repentance; — they may be sorry, heartily so, yet only naturally so, but they must be religiously so, seriously disposed to apply themselves to God by prayer for pardon of their sins, and as seriously resolved to lay them aside. This disposition they should sensibly feel; and this disposition should be tried, as well as felt, before they approach with it to the Sacrament. For no one will think, that a profligate sinner, who wakes, perhaps repentant, on the Sunday morning, let his reflections and resolutions be ever so good, can as soon be made fit for the Sacrament that day, as he can get himself dressed for church. He ought to stay away till he can put his repentance to some trial and improvement, under every religious and devout assistance he can apply, before he advances with it as a qualification for receiving the Sacrament. — Yet, on the other hand, the regular good Christian, on as short a notice,

may safely repair thither, and does not judge right, if he refuses to go, merely because he has omitted a prescribed form of preparation in the preceding week.

I hope I am not misunderstood. I do not condemn such helps to Christian devotion — they are certainly useful; that those who want so much assistance (and many do), may be supplied with it; and that others, who may more properly be said to *like* than to *want* them, may take pleasure in their devotion: but when many, who do not want them, think they must use them, and mistrust their worthiness for communicating if they do not — so far, and on that account, they seem to be rather hindrances than helps to religion.

The ordinary devotions of the daily service of the Church, as they are a ready help, so they are, I will not say the only, but the best — as one public duty is a proper introduction to another, and because the public prayers of the church supply us with the most proper mode of expression for our private devotions, on this, or on any other occasion. A regular observance of both, with a diligent encouragement of such thoughts and reflections as will naturally arise in the mind of every
serious

serious Christian upon the approach of the Sacrament, I hope I may be allowed to say is ordinarily a sufficient preparation for receiving it worthily. — How much more *must* be added on extraordinary occasions, to make the performance of this duty safe, or how much more *may* be added on any occasions, to make it more satisfactory and agreeable — I will not take upon me to direct; but leaving it to every one's sincerity to feel what he wants, and to his judgment in applying it, will conclude with a petition to Almighty God (without whose help we are not able to please him) that his Holy Spirit may in this, and in all things, direct and rule our hearts, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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THE

S E R M O N L X V .

ON THE AGENCY OF GOOD AND EVIL
SPIRITS.

J O B i. 16.

There was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.

HERE is a representation of God's supremacy in the government of the world. The angels of heaven present themselves before him, to pay him homage, and receive his behests. Satan, in this representation, is introduced among them, and, though his employment in the world is of an opposite nature to that, in which good angels are engaged, yet he is made to bend to the same supremacy.

God

God questions Satan about his conduct: —
“ From whence comest thou, Satan ?” he answers, “ From going to and fro upon
“ the earth, and from walking up and down
“ in it.” Satan suppresses any account of his mischievous employment; but it was too well known to need any. God immediately, upon Satan’s reply, proposes to him his servant Job, “ Hast thou considered my
“ servant Job, that there is none like him
“ in the earth, a perfect and an upright
“ man; one that feareth God, and eschew-
“ eth evil ?” — And upon Satan’s malicious diminution of Job’s merit, as if his piety was merely mercenary, and that, if God would withdraw his wealth, Job would withdraw his obedience, God gives him commission to try him, “ Behold, all that he
“ hath is in thy power, only upon him-
“ self put not forth thy hand.” Satan no sooner received this commission, but he repaired with great alacrity to put it in execution.

In this representation, we see God permits evil spirits to work mischief in the world, but, that he superintends and directs where that mischief shall fall. We
see

see too, from this representation, that the same great enemy of our happiness, who so successfully plotted the fall of our first parents, is still carrying on his plots against their posterity. His envy has ever been directed at innocence; he beguiled Eve, he tried Job, and he tempted our Saviour. Thus, in the course of those dispensations, which God has been laying forth, from the beginning of the world, for the salvation of mankind, Satan is suffered, at proper periods, to make, as it were, his personal appearance; as if God meant to shew us, against what enemy this abundant care of his Providence steps forth to guard us, and to remind us of that care for ourselves which so dangerous an enemy makes necessary in us.

The evils, which Satan inflicted on Job, were natural evils, yet were they too, in their operation, moral trials, as they put his constancy to proof. That Satan still interposes, and lays both natural and moral difficulties before us, is what we are taught from the story of Job; for it is set before us for our use and imitation; now Job's behaviour cannot be recommended to our imitation,

imitation, but as we are liable to Job's trials.

That there are intermediate beings between God and man, and that some are good, and others bad—that they have a power, which they can employ upon the material system about us—and that they are permitted to employ it in producing natural good and evil, are suppositions very warrantable from Scripture;—that they are permitted to employ it in producing natural evil, the story of Job is a lesson; and David, after a long enumeration of natural afflictions, says, “God cast upon them
“the furiousness of his wrath, by sending
“evil angels among them.” Psalm lxxviii. 44. That they are permitted to employ their power in producing natural good, the whole sacred history confirms, as it abounds with instances, where good angels are busied in directing material causes to good effects.

Thus we have spiritual enemies above us and about us, who are permitted to do us natural mischief. Nor are their operations confined within that limit; they are potent and busy in working the moral hurt of the soul,

soul, as well as the natural mischief of the body; and, besides galling us with afflictions, are ever seducing the mind with temptations. That good angels are employed in the moral, as well as the natural part of God's government, will admit no doubt, when we are so plainly told by the Apostle, that "they are
" ministring spirits, sent forth to minister for
" them, who shall be the heirs of salvation."

Heb. i. 14. And that evil angels are permitted to exert their opposite moral mischief is clear, when we find the same Apostle reckoning angels among the several causes which might "draw him from the love of God."

Rom. viii. 38. That we are liable to temptations we feel, that we are not to ascribe them to God we know, as the Apostle hath left us this direction, "Let no man say, when
" he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for
" God cannot himself be tempted with evil,
" neither tempteth he any man;" Jam. i. 13.

—but that our own lusts, under the instigation of Satan, are the true cause, to which we are to ascribe them, the same Apostle, as well as other divine writers, constantly inculcate.

We see from what quarter our mischief comes, and that God, in his government of the world, permits bad angels to exert their
power

power in producing natural and moral evil among us; — they always stand ready for such employment — and this representation vindicates God's purity. God created not evil, but he created both angels and men, who made themselves so. When angels had made themselves so, either they must have been deprived of all existence, or, being suffered to exist, must continue their evil nature. If we say God should have destroyed them, we know not what we say, or how far the destruction of that part of the creation would have been suitable, or how far the sufferance of it is useful to the government of the whole; and if we allow the existence of evil angels, we must admit the production of such effects as arise from their natural power and disposition. If the Governor of the world so far controuls their mischievous powers, that he either restrains or permits them, as he sees conducive to the purposes of his government, he does enough to distinguish his purity and to assert his supremacy.

That God does this, we see in the story of Job; Satan went not forth to him, but with God's permission; and when he went, he found himself limited in the mischief he was to work. His first commission suffered him
to

to meddle with no more than Job's substance; nor could he touch his person, till he appeared for fresh orders, which still were given with limitation, and though they allowed him to afflict Job's person, they absolutely forbade him to touch his life.

This circumstance in Job's story supplies us with this useful observation—that evil angels employ their malicious assiduity in working much evil among us, but that they, as well as wicked men, are under the sovereign controul of God's most wise and righteous providence. This observation contains matter for our fears, and matter for our comfort;—it should make us fearful, in order to make us cautious—when we consider what sort of enemies they are who lay in wait to do us mischief;—and it should give us comfort, when we reflect—that their operations are under the controul of God's almighty wisdom and goodness.

Powerful as the cause may be, whether from evil spirits or from wicked men—God is more powerful, who controuls that cause; and, as God will not suffer Satan to lay afflictions on our heads, or temptations in our hearts, according to the measure of his

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envy, so neither will he permit him, or wicked men, to lay them upon us or before us, but in proportion to our strength, if we will exert that strength in our management of them.

SERMON

S E R M O N LXVI.

ON THE GOOD AND EVIL OF LIFE.

J O B i. 22.

*In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God
foolishly.*

THIS closes the recital of Job's afflictions, which were many, and great, and too well known to need repeating to you. They were inflicted upon him by Satan; but by the permission and under the controul of God himself.

In this circumstance lies our comfort, and our encouragement for constancy, under affliction or temptation. It were little comfort to have known but this, that God permits evil beings to molest us, which, considered merely by itself, is a dreadful circumstance: nor would the example of Job's constancy

and fortitude, under his afflictions and temptations, have been a sufficient encouragement for us, who, with no observation to direct us, might think ourselves liable to greater, or feel ourselves not capable of bearing so much; but it is both a real comfort and encouragement to be taught, that though God lets loose evil beings, whether angels or men, upon us, yet they are under the management of his hand; and Job's example stands before us, as a proof, not only of his fortitude, but of God's care—that when he suffers evil beings to afflict or tempt us, he restrains them within the limits of what we are able to bear.

The far greatest part of the book of Job is taken up in a dramatical controversy upon the providence of God, and Job's integrity; in which controversy though Job takes the right side, and has fine sentiments, yet, if we knew no more of his example, than what appears from that part of the book, we might perhaps be at a loss to know, how his character of patience rose up into a proverb; for, however he *acted*, he certainly *argues* with impatience. But this impatience may be an artificial expedient, to throw an air of nature and probability upon the controversy

troverſy — for moſt controverſies, though they do not require acrimony and impatience, generally produce it.

But the true leſſon we are to draw from the conduct of Job, lies in the plain narrative, which introduces the dramatical controverſy, and which afterwards concludes it. In the former we are ſhewn the true reaſons for patience and reſignation under affliction, in the latter we are ſhewn the reward of it.

Job reflects, and reſigns — and the reflection on which he places his reſignation is — “ The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, bleſſed be the name of the Lord.”

God, as ſovereign Governor of the world, diſpenſes what we call good and evil; but not merely in conſequence of his infinite power; his infinite wiſdom directs his power; and what we call good and evil, are, both of them, means equally good, and conducive to the purpoſes of his wiſe government over us. When he ſends us good, as we are not diſpoſed to quarrel with his diſpenſation, ſo, perhaps, we are as little diſpoſed to enquire why he ſends it: yet, would we aſk ourſelves that queſtion, we ſhould find, upon reflection, that the good we receive

from Providence, is not merely a gift, but an appointment of our Governor ; by which he sets us our part of duty and work in his government ; and in this view of his blessings we are most likely to apply them right. The same reflection reaches to the evils of life — they too are the appointment of a wise Governor ; if therefore we receive good at the hand of God, because he sends it to serve the purposes of his government, we must, for the same reason, receive evil at his hand, if he thinks fit to send it. The evil of human life is a term, by which we express whatever we dislike in it ; but, as all that we call evil comes by the direction of God, and as nothing can be, strictly speaking, evil, which God applies to good purposes, the expression is not so just as it is common ; flesh and blood will reject it as a paradox, perhaps, if we say there is no such thing as evil in human life, but reason and religion will distinguish and own the truth of it — that, however some events in human life may fit with uneasiness on those they reach, yet, when considered as parts of God's administration, they are and must be good.

With respect to the different stations and conditions of men in the world — God's
government

government of mankind is an epitome of his government of the universe; as the whole system is made up of parts subordinate to each other, so this part, which we call mankind, is made up of orders and degrees, one above another. In this variety of stations, those who have the lowest are not so properly in distress, as they are appointed to fill those offices in the state of mankind which some must fill. Yet how often are our complaints against Providence levelled at the disproportion we observe between one man's abundance and another's want, between one man's ease and another's labour; and how apt are we to think ourselves unfortunate in missing our aims at higher seats, and being confined to a low one!—yet in this wonderful machine of the human world, there must be small as well as greater movements, some more ornamental than others, but all for use — Little wheels may wish to be larger, but it might hurt the machine to make them so. This should teach us patience, under those hardships which belong to our particular stations in life; especially when we consider, that there is no station in life, in which Providence does not bestow his blessings;—when we

confine our reflections to ourselves, we feel it so, but we are ever working ourselves uneasiness by impertinent comparisons, and lose the grateful sense of what we really have, by looking at what we fancy others feel; this makes us impatient, when we ought to be thankful, and we complain of imaginary evil, because we are not sensible of real good.

With respect to the calamities of life—those which fall upon us in the apparent nature of punishment deserve our thanks, at least silence our complaints. As the evil we suffer from a hard or low station is subservient to the general good of the system, so our calamities, besides a general use, may be subservient to our own particular good—others may be made better by our sufferings, and what is sent us for a punishment in this life may be a means of preventing a much greater in the next. Even such calamities as fall upon us without any apparent reason have their advantage, as they may improve our own virtues and afford others an opportunity of exerting theirs in the management and relief of them. Adversity, 'tis true, is no more desirable than physic, but may be as necessary; nor is it
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what we fancy of our moral health, but what God sees in us, which determines him to administer it. — But, besides the preservation of our moral health, calamities may be set before us merely as an exercise; it is not always to keep men from vice, or to punish it, that God pours affliction on our heads; it is a duty to which he may call us, as he did Job, with all our virtues about us. Tis true, no man can, strictly, say he does not deserve affliction as a punishment, or want it for his improvement; yet, in a comparative view, many good men are rather *tried* than *punished* by affliction. If this world does not shew us why, religion and the next will tell us; it calls forth virtues which would otherwise have laid dormant in us, and it calls them forth, not only to public view, and the benefit of others, but that they may be rewarded in another life. There they have their connection — perhaps a stronger than they have here; — there, whoever has acquitted himself, under more sufferings than belonged to him as a member of this system, shall meet with a proportionable reward as a member of the kingdom of heaven. — In short, when we have considered

considered the several kinds of affliction, which hover about our present state, there are none but what will afford us reasons for resignation — ‘ They are all sent by proper authority — they are all conducive to some good — either public or personal — either here or hereafter.’ — Yet impatience makes us slight their authority, and frustrate their design; we bear affliction, as if we thought ourselves entitled to happiness from our very birth, not reflecting, that though happiness is the design of our being, yet we must arrive at it by degrees — there are several stages in the progress, and man can no more be happy at once, than a plant can at once produce the fruit it is intended to bear.

Job was made happy at last — for the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning. This is a suitable conclusion of Job’s story, which, as it is intended for our instruction in the ways of Providence, and to teach us resignation under his appointments, should conclude happily, because man, when he resigns himself to the direction of Providence must be so. But yet we must not so apply the conclusion of this story, as if it taught us to expect the same

same recovery from affliction which Job had. His distresses were removed, and he lived long enough to die happily; but though we bear our afflictions like him, yet we may not be relieved as he was, and, after carrying our burthen for a time, be allowed to walk quietly and easily to the grave. Common experience forbids an absolute expectation of this immediate reward of our resignation; — but we may look upon the conclusion of Job's story as containing a lesson of general hopes in a retribution, at some time or other, if not in this life yet in that which is to come.

And if we turn our attention to Christ's revelation and his promises, we shall find this lesson amply confirmed. He shews us the author, the reasons, and the reward of our sufferings, and sets himself before us as an example of the bitterest that can fall on human nature. He hath assured us, that this life is but a passage to another; that here we are disciplined as children of God, but shall hereafter be received as heirs of his happiness in the kingdom of heaven. He tells us, that in the world we must have tribulation, either such as naturally belongs to the condition in which Providence has placed

placed us, or such as by his appointment is sent to correct us, or to exercise and improve our own virtues and the virtues of those about us; but in all these cases we may be more than conquerors, through him who, as he has told us what to expect, is also ready to strengthen us in undergoing it. If we are attentive to his word and promises, we may not only disarm our afflictions of their present sting, by a patient resignation, but may make them instrumental in procuring us eternal happiness, by prudently applying them to the purposes for which they were sent.

Christ shews his own love for us, in that, having been himself tried with human affliction, he is ready to assist and comfort those who follow him under it. He bids us too be assured of the love of God for man — that the lightest evils fall not without his direction, nor the greatest beyond his reach — that reasons of unerring wisdom direct his care in the conduct of them, and what he sends for our good, will never be productive of our misery. His love is ever watchful for our weakness, and if, in his dispensations of universal government, he works with evil, as with good, yet is his work as full

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full of pity, as it is full of wisdom. His eye follows his hand over mankind, and when he lets loose evil among us, he suffers no more to fall than we want or than we can bear; — in short, whilst he is chastising or improving us with the severities of this life, he is qualifying us for the happiness of the next, where he will reward our sufferings and perfect our condition.

SERMON

S E R M O N LXVII.

ON THE UNCERTAINTY OF TO-MORROW.

P R O V E R B S xxvii. 1.

*Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest
not what a day may bring forth.*

THE uncertainty of events in human life is a matter which needs neither proof nor description. We will therefore carry our thoughts directly to the instruction it affords. Doubtless it has some; and, as it often happens that evils contain their own remedy within them, so this uncertainty we complain of may supply us with reflections, which may make it both easy and useful to us.

‘ The uncertainty of events in human life is
‘ a circumstance which adapts us to the go-
‘ vernment of Providence, under which we are
‘ placed.’

Dependence

Dependence is a necessary foundation of government; and man being placed under God's government, it is proper he should be so qualified, as to feel his dependence upon him; and, being furnished with such qualifications as are suitable for the discharge of his duty, he has what is sufficient, without the farther allowance of such as might weaken his obedience, by weakening his sense of dependence.

The knowledge of futurity is a knowledge which the Almighty reserves to himself, and on which stands his government over his creatures; who feel a reason for obeying him, in the expectation of what he may or may not dispense to them. This is clearly the state of man, whatever may be the state of superior Beings—with whom, as we are not acquainted, so we are not qualified to reason about them.

Hope is the great principle of man's obedience to God's government; nor is it material to look for a more disinterested principle, since we plainly feel that this is a necessary one, and as plainly know that God has directed us to build our obedience upon it. We are not therefore to complain, if we are destitute

tute of that knowledge which is inconsistent with hope.

It is hope, not knowledge, which keeps us constantly employed in the work, which Providence hath set us to do.

An insight into future events would make us careless or desperate in our behaviour; for we should feel no reason for studying either to procure a good, which we already saw secured to us, or to escape an evil, which we saw unalterably determined for us. All our operations and designs, both natural and moral, arise from expectancy; uncertainty sets us all at work, and promotes that circulation of business through human life, which promotes a circulation of the good belonging to it. In short, we cannot pursue the supposition of certainty in human events, without running upon absurdities, and therefore we must conclude, that we are properly placed in the want of it; as we are probationers for happiness, certainty in future events does not suit us, for a state of trial implies a state of uncertainty.

Such a state manifestly supplies us with a reason against being confident in our expectations of the good belonging to human life.

“Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”

The advice is doubtless just, as the reason on which 'tis built is true; for, if we cannot command future events, we ought not to behave as if we could. But it is observable, that this advice of Solomon's is partial, when the reason on which it stands is more extensive:—the uncertainty of human events is as good a reason for not being afraid of to-morrow, as it is for not boasting of it—for not being timorous, as for not being confident in our expectations.

Why then does Solomon confine his advice to one part of our conduct, when the reason he gives equally belongs to both?—The advice is directed to that part of our conduct, where it is most wanted. The expectation of evil, as well as the sufferance of it, makes us humble—in which disposition we sooner feel what is our duty, and are more tractable in the performance of it: but the expectation of good, like the possession of it, elevates the heart, and fills it with sentiments which are apt to destroy our attention and regard to our duty. Solomon therefore directs his advice to that disposition which has the most pernicious effect upon our behaviour, and throws in a guard

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guard against the common temper of mankind, by which they are led to take too little notice of what is certain and before them, by a too eager attention to what their expectations have promised them hereafter.

For, dark as our prospect into futurity is, we are ever straining our view into it, and though we cannot make the least discovery, yet, like those who are lost in the dark, our imagination supplies us with objects, and we make up to them as the points which are to direct us. What makes it the more difficult to govern our thoughts and expectations properly in this matter is, that our situation obliges us to make some provision for futurity, and to act upon a presumption of what is yet to happen; and it is no easy thing in this, as well as in many other instances, to hit the true point, beyond which, if we proceed, what was before a duty becomes a fault. The care which to-morrow justly claims of us, easily rises to a solicitude which is not due to it, and which often cheats the present day of the duties which belong to it.

There lies the blame, and the absurdity:—to make provision for future events is not inconsistent with the uncertainty of them—is prudence;—but to set our hearts on what only

may happen is absurd, as it is applying what is not in our possession : for such is the extent of human folly, that we misapply not only what we have, but what we have not;—nor is this strange—for our expectations, as well as our enjoyments, influence our judgments, and we are betrayed into wrong actions by an improper application of the one, as well as of the other.

Our expectations from futurity are concerned about good and evil, and a little attention will direct us how to apply them properly. Our expectation of evil naturally suggests a care in providing what we can, for preventing it, or for sustaining it. On the other hand, our expectation of good as naturally leads us to take care not to prevent it; but it does not authorize us to enjoy it; and it is observable, how ready we are to exclaim against the anticipation of evil, and yet are so eager to enjoy good before we have it—this, though it is not surprizing, is however not consistent, for the same reason lies against both.

But the folly in presuming upon future events appears in the worst light, when we promise ourselves future time to consume it on our appetites; as here we promise ourselves what we have no right to, and claim the free gift

gift of God, in order to abuse it; like the rich fool in the parable, who, surveying his wealth, said to himself—"Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for thee for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry;"—but mark the reproof he met with—"Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." The picture represents a great part of mankind. It is natural to promise ourselves length of days, yet how few are there, who, if they would seriously ask themselves to what use they intend to apply them, would not own their reason to be as improper, as their promise is vain?

Not that men generally promise themselves life, with an intent to make a vicious use of it; but that we are apt to wish for many days, rather for the opportunity of enjoying what we like, than of doing what we ought. Different men place their enjoyments upon different objects, and though all are not viciously engaged, yet the trifles of life are an abuse of our time, as well as its vices; and he who addresses his soul with the proposal of much enjoyment laid up for it, in empty amusements, or a slothful inactivity, commits the same error as he who bids it "eat, drink, and be merry;"—he promises himself what he

cannot demand, and for a reason which he ought to be ashamed of.

But we see too many instances among mankind, where the picture of the rich fool is exactly copied, not only in the confident expectation of life, but in the design of applying it. We see it in every character where vice is the object of pursuit, and projects are laid for its enjoyments; where, at the same time that men presume upon what is not their own to claim, they affront the power from whence they are to expect it.

To conclude:

We should make the uncertainty of to-morrow a reason for the proper application of to-day; and, if we send our thoughts into futurity, we should send them no farther, and for no other purposes, than what our dependence upon God, and the obedience we owe to him, will warrant. Would we but consider, that we are every moment under his inspection, and at his disposal, and that our best title to future days is to deserve them, we should feel all the reason for directing our solicitude to the present time, and none for a confident expectation of the future; for who can assure himself he has so used to-day, that he deserves to-morrow? but who dares be confident.

fident of to-morrow, who purposes to abuse it?

Our honest purposes must be laid with a view to his approbation, and a submission to his will, on whom we depend for the allowance of that time which is wanted for the execution of them;—this will best secure them the desired success, and will be a suitable encouragement of such hope of futurity as is allowed us, and becomes us, without filling us with confidence, which is not allowed us, and does not become us. But all vicious purposes, however artfully laid, will be found highly absurd, when we consider they are formed under his inspection, who cannot approve them, and upon a presumption of our having that time allowed us, which is wholly at his pleasure to bestow.

In short, let us not vainly boast of to-morrow, but wisely use to-day—prepared to receive whatever future days may bring us, but not eagerly running out to meet them.—Or, if we would indulge the natural passion of the soul, and send it a flight into futurity, let us not send it into the dark, uncomfortable regions of human events—rather let it stretch its wing for the brighter tracts which Christian revelation has opened, and to which it is in-

vited—let the more important and more certain events of the next life employ its contemplation—there let it plan its true happiness, where it will take up its eternal residence, when the delusions of this world are vanished like a dream.

S E R M O N LXVIII.

ON THE PROGRESS IN VIRTUE.

LUKE ix. 61, 62.

Another said, Lord, I will follow thee, but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house.

And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of heaven.

WE are very irresolute and mutable in all our purposes, more especially in our religious purposes; — nor is it wonderful — made up as we are of such opposite principles within us, as right reason and wrong appetite.

The reasons for living a good life are strong and important; they make us own it eligible, they make us resolve to pursue it; nor would
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our natural depravity long oppose the pursuit, was it not that we too often step back to indulge it. The appetites, arising from the depravity of our nature, are strong, but they are ever stronger for indulgence; and every time we step aside from our good purposes, to take leave of our wrong desires, by indulging them, we strengthen the difficulty we should remove, and, though nature at first makes us unwilling, it is from our mismanagement that we are at last unable, to pursue the resolutions we have taken.

When once we have begun a good life, we should be very careful how we suffer ourselves to be drawn aside from it, not only because a return to it is uncertain, but because, if we do return, our progress afterwards will be the more difficult for such avocation.—We must look forward only, “forgetting those things which are behind,” the temptations, or, as we call them, the enjoyments of the world, and “reaching forth unto those things which are before,” our duty here, and our happiness hereafter, must “press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

There are two sorts of men concerned in this advice.

1. The

1. The first are those who have not now to begin a good life, but are advanced some way in the path of virtue and religion—I do not mean who are advanced to perfection, for I know not where I can speak to such; but who are regular and constant in their endeavours to live a good life, who are on their guard against the ordinary temptations of the world, and, though they may be surprized, yet do not suffer themselves to be defeated by them.

Such will need but little exhortation to look forward; and indeed such have less danger in looking backward; for, where a good education has taken effect upon the early part of life, and maturer years have not thwarted that effect, we may look back on what we have been, and thence receive direction for present and future duty. Those who are so happy as to feel themselves in this situation, find no vicious pleasures in their recollection to poison their taste of virtue, and to make the work of it more difficult; on the contrary, as they have long been accustomed to virtue and religion, they feel a true relish for it, and their work in pursuing it is for that reason the more easy, as well as the more delightful. But then the easier and more delightful their work is, the greater is their shame and mischief if they fail
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in it—and they may fail; if they are in no danger of being drawn back into old vices, they may be drawn aside into new ones.

Such therefore must look forward, and, having put their hand to the plough, and already made advancement in their work, they must keep a steady pace towards the mark they are aiming at, and, as they feel no temptation from looking back, must submit to none in looking aside.

It is recommended in common industry to think nothing done, whilst any thing is still to do. It were prudent to apply this to our industry in the work of a good life, for there doubtless the most diligent has still much to do. Whoever is so persuaded, will have little inclination to look or listen to such temptations as, by drawing him aside from his work, will add to that which he already finds enough.

Our obligation to persist in a good life, certainly grows stronger in proportion as we advance higher in it: for, though God's commands lay an equal obligation on all, yet, each man, by his own conduct, adds more weight to that obligation, in proportion as by his conduct he renders himself more capable of answering it. Besides, we owe the improvement

ment of our abilities to the benefit of God's grace, and therefore stand accountable to God's justice for the use and application of them; who will examine how we have applied his gifts, as well as how we have performed his commands; and we know who it is that has declared, "He who knows his master's will, and doth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."

"Let such, therefore, as stand, take heed, lest they fall;"—the higher they are got, the greater will be their fall—and, which we should always well remember, the more difficult will be their recovery: for, when men have broke through the very strongest motives for persisting in a good life (as they have, who break through a habit of virtue to come at vice), they cannot expect to find stronger for returning to it; and when the strongest motives are insufficient for keeping us good, the weakest will be sufficient to make us wicked.

2. The second sort of men, concerned in the advice before us, are those who have but lately left their wicked courses to pursue good ones; who have sense and reflection enough left to prefer virtue to vice, and, like the man in my text, are resolved to follow where religion calls them, but still, like him, are not yet

so steadily fixed to their new work, but they are glad of a pretence, though a weak one, for deferring or suspending it.

Let such be told, that if they still look back with pleasure on their past follies, it is a symptom that their resolution of leaving them is not rightly formed, and consequently, unless great care be applied, will not be rightly executed. Their present resolutions arise perhaps from accident, from caprice, from satiety, from some temporary distress, or, it may be, from some grave advice, applied in one of the few critical junctures, when the heart was in a disposition to receive it, and the passions not at home to prevent it. These good resolutions, thus raised, are not substantial securities for a good life, and are not to be left to themselves without farther care. Those who feel them, if they do not press forward, will soon be for looking back, and, when the incident which gave occasion for such good resolutions is removed, will be very apt to go back to their former practices; for in this situation, the weakest call will be strong enough to draw them, where they have already more than half a mind to run. But with a proper care, such resolutions, as were not at first rightly founded, though they were rightly formed, may yet
carry

carry them where they may have leisure and disposition to place them on their proper principles—on a reverence to Christ's commands—a rational approbation of virtue—and a sincere distaste to vice. When men feel these principles within them, like ground to stand upon; they may have hope—*hope*, not *confidence*—for getting on; till then, every step forward is precarious; and they make but an awkward figure for flight, whilst they stand, as if they should go forward, but look, as if they would go backward.

In the beginning of a reformation then we should use great caution in avoiding, every, the least look backward that brings pleasure with it.—Retrospection, which, in many cases, is a necessary work of the mind, is however sometimes dangerous. When we have looked back on our past conduct so long as to be sensible it is wrong, and to repent of it, we have looked long enough, we should not stay to look how far it has been pleasant.—The recollection of past sins, whilst we consider them as such, is a natural step towards avoiding them; but a recollection of past pleasure is a natural step towards repeating it. We should therefore fly from every invitation that may call us
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where we are disposed to go.—If any one will fit, and fancy himself virtuous, because he is resolved to be so, and yet runs over his past scenes with pleasure, and at last proposes just to step back and take leave of his favourite enjoyments—he will find himself fatally mistaken in three very material points.

1. In the first place, he will find himself disappointed in the enjoyments even of a wicked life, upon his return to them.

For he carries back with him such self-conviction of his folly, a conviction improved by his late sober resolutions, that it will rise to disturb his enjoyments with smarter strokes than those he felt, when he was there before. Whilst a man is only wicked, he will be open only to the impressions of vice; but as soon as he admits a mixture of virtue, as well as vice, within him, he will, for a time at least, feel impressions from both; and as, during his imperfect resolutions of goodness, his recollections of past vices gave him pleasure, so, upon his relapse into vice, his recollection of past virtue will give him pain, which, if he seeks to remove by plunging deeper into vice, as is too frequently the case, he desperately seeks his remedy in his ruin.

2. If

2. If, in the second place, upon this disappointment in his return to vice, he seeks again to virtue, there too he will find himself mistaken. There he will find, not only all his former work to do, but more, to reinstate himself, and yet will feel less relish for the doing it. His taste for virtue will be more weakened; his taste for vice, if not more heightened, will be more hardened; he will feel himself more afraid than ashamed of vice, and rather forced into virtue, than voluntarily choosing it.

3. In this dubious condition, where he sacrifices as often to one interest, as he pays devotion to the other—he is wicked upon principle, and good only upon fancy, and by fits—his last, and the fatal mistake of all is, that he is not fit for the kingdom of heaven; for “what concord hath Christ with Belial?” or, how does he serve God, who serveth Mammon also? The righteous jealousy of God admits no partnership in our services; he requires them all—the whole, imperfect at the best; but the imperfection of our whole services, the merits and mediation of Christ will recommend;—but partial services, between Christ and Satan, his Gospel forbids, and his judgment will condemn.

Let us then take heed how we suffer temptations to draw us from our good resolutions. Having once turned our backs on sin, let us not only renounce friendship, but all acquaintance with it. Let us not think ourselves secure, because we have resolved, and begun to live well; or, that we may venture to play with our former follies, by taking them to us, and setting them from us, just as we please, without any hurt. We should remember, that though we resolve to leave the follies of the world, the follies of the world have not left us; and that, turn when we will, they are ready at hand to embrace us, and to hold us the faster, for having slipped from them. Let us remember, that relapses are dangerous—relapses into sin especially so, as they not only discover the weakness of our minds, but the wickedness of our hearts; and not only discover, but strengthen it, and lead us to worse mischiefs than we have avoided.

If the unclean spirit be once gone out of our hearts, let us remember, that, should he return again, he will “bring with him seven other
“spirits worse than himself, who will enter in
“and dwell with him, and then our last state
“will be worse than the first.” Let us then employ our minds, not in thinking ourselves
secure,

secure, but in making ourselves so:—if he be out, let us keep him out; and apply our care in such a manner, that when he returns, he may not find our hearts decked and made ready for his reception, but that he may find them absolutely shut against him. But, above all things, let us not go out to parley with him;—this is madness—this will be destruction.

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S E R M O N L X I X .

THE DUTY OF AVOIDING BAD COMPANY.

P S A L M i . i .

Blessed is the man, who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

I SHALL take the liberty to understand these words of the Psalmist, as his advice for avoiding bad company; and there seems to be a propriety in beginning this collection of religious meditations with that, which is the first step towards leading a religious life, the advantages of which are set forth in this Psalm, under a very natural description.

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It is an easy observation, that the same circumstance in our condition, from whence we derive the blessings of life, supplies us with the mischiefs belonging to it: the blessings of life can neither be procured nor enjoyed, but by conversation with each other, yet the conversation we have with each other betrays us into mischief, as well as helps us to the good we aim at.

For which reason, we should be careful in the choice of our company, and should especially avoid such sort of men as the Psalmist hath here pointed out — the ungodly, those who have no religion in them — sinners, those who are practised in vice — and scorners, who make a mock at religion and those who profess it.

Such company should be avoided; for the best security of virtue is to keep out of the way of temptation, rather than trust our conduct wholly upon resisting it. Familiarity with vice lessens our abhorrence of it, gradually weakens our guard against it, and, after leading us to indifference, may betray us into approbation. Great aversion often changes into great affection; and when a man loses his distaste to the bad company he

he is fallen into, it is high time for him to be gone.

It is very true, men's own vicious passions may be strong enough to subdue their virtue, without assistance — but not without a struggle. — A man left wholly to himself will not be left wholly without reason, or without religion, the remonstrances of which will, for a time, rise up to oppose the proposals of vice; but bad company sets this conflict upon much too unequal terms, by giving vice all the advantage, and disabling reason and religion of the little strength it has to exert. The malignity of bad company steals insensibly upon the heart; variety of objects and of incidents arise to throw it open, which, if innocent in themselves, may introduce what is otherwise, and the entertainment we meet with is but too often the vehicle of poisonous mischief. Yet on these occasions we are apt to think, that if we distinguish a man's vices from his good qualities, and feel a proper distaste for the former, we are safe in his company; though we should think it absurd, as well as dangerous, to sit with an infected person and presume we

are safe, because we can distinguish the comeliness of his figure, from the distemper he has upon him. — It is not so easy to love any one for his good qualities, and despise him for his vicious ones, as the common use of such declaration seems to imply: love and contempt are contrary affections, and cannot long keep joint residence on the same object; one will displace the other; and we may see those who make this distinction very unable to maintain it, but, after fixing their approbation on the good qualities of their companion, they gradually diminish their contempt of his bad ones; they first pity, then excuse him, after which, they have good luck if they do not approve and imitate him.

Artful insinuations in favour of vice easily gain admittance, and may in time steal the approbation, and, without waiting for that, will often gain compliance; for it is the common progress of vice, that it conquers the will, before it perverts the understanding; a sinner takes many steps in opposition to the dictates of better judgment, before ignorance plunges him into ruin; and he complies with what is sinful, and what he

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he thinks to be so, long before he is taught, and can persuade himself, to change the term, and think it venial — a word of frequent use with the practised sinner, which, however, he misunderstands, or misapplies. Almost all sins are venial, that is, may be pardoned upon true repentance, and no sin is pardonable without; but when the sinner, for instance, calls fornication venial, it may be he means it is no sin at all, but an indifferent act, which requires no religious repentance, but shall be pardoned without it, and therefore he never troubles himself to refrain or to repent: or, if he thinks it to be a sin, but a pardonable one, why does he not treat it as such? by refraining from it, as it is a sin, or by having recourse to repentance, as that is the only method by which he can obtain a pardon for it.

It should surely deter any thinking man from bad company, to consider them (what they really are), as schools, set up in opposition to Christ, and in defiance of his authority — to teach, that those are not sins, which he hath expressly declared to be so, and to harden each other against that repentance, which he hath expressly commanded,

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ed, and on which their eternal salvation depends.

Men often comply with the enticements of bad company on the principle of good-nature. This is weakness, nor is it harsh to call it so; the qualities of the mind, which, under proper culture, rise up to virtues, often become follies for want of it; as some flowers degenerate into weeds, for want of care. The desire of pleasing is an amiable quality, but, as it is applicable to a variety of objects, so it is only valuable when it is rightly applied. It is rightly used, when it carries us through our own inconveniences to assist the reasonable ease of others; but it is much abused, when it carries us beyond our duty, or our safety, to assist their unreasonable, but much more their wicked, humours. A man may give up his natural good to the service or to the pleasure of another, but he must not give up his virtue and his duty; he is allowed the disposal of his natural good for promoting the happiness of others, but he is enjoined the preservation of his virtue for maintaining his own: an imprudent disposal of our natural good is culpable; but to throw
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up our virtue to the humours of men, shews a daring choice of their favour, in preference to the favour of God.

Many give up their better judgment, in compliance with bad company, rather than they will appear singular; as if it was a universal duty to think and act as we find others do. Singularity of sentiment is the natural effect of that principle within us, by which we are capable of judging for ourselves; nor is it, at any time, the singularity itself, that is properly blameable, but the reasons on which it stands. It is true, one man may be more likely to be mistaken than many; but where the many are evidently wrong, there can be no fault in the opposite opinion, merely for being singular. Where singularity of sentiment and behaviour stands upon a regard for virtue and religion, it will always justify itself; but an obsequious compliance with the vicious humours of others, through fear of being thought singular, is as absurd, as if a man would sooner sink in a common wreck, than be the only one who swims safe to shore.

Such as feel themselves directed by good-nature and modesty of opinion, in their compliance

pliance with bad company, are apt to be mistaken in two very material points. 1st. As they do not comply upon a vicious principle, they think they are more excusable, and flatter themselves they are not the worse for their compliance. But, they are so far from being more excusable, that they are less so; — their being led aside by good qualities will work less in excusing them, than their being led aside in opposition to their own better judgment will work in condemning them: and for their not being the worse for their compliance, they often feel the contrary, in the natural consequences of it, nor will they escape the moral mischief of it; for vice will work the same bad effect upon the heart, whether we go forth, or are led forth to meet it. 2d. Another mistake incident to this sort of men is, they think the world is as well acquainted with the reasons on which they comply, as they themselves are, and that the world will give the same indulgence of judgment; whereas the world ordinarily knows no more than their actual behaviour; the motives of their behaviour, as they cannot be known without search, so it is seldom thought worth while to

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to search for them; or, if the world be acquainted with the motives, the most it will allow will be pity, which is mixed with too much contempt and condemnation, to make those satisfied and happy who are allowed it.

In short — good-nature, and modesty of opinion, are virtues — but there are other virtues besides; and, as every virtue must be properly directed, in order to produce its proper effect, so no virtue is properly directed, when it stands forth to defeat another virtue, or when it is applied in opposition to our general duty. All the virtues belonging to our nature are calculated to assist, not contradict, each other, and to promote an uniform progress through duty to happiness; they should not set us at variance with ourselves, and stop our way in settling precedence among them. There will be occasions enough, and more proper, for exerting our good-nature and modesty of opinion, without making them pay court to vice; and, so long as we keep a steady progress by the general direction of religion, particular virtues will have room to appear, in their proper places, without stepping forth improperly,

properly, to be made more conspicuous than they should be.

But there is yet another weakness in the human temper, which much assists the malignant influence of bad company; and that is, a want of spirit and firmness to bear the attack of ridicule, which beats young minds especially off their guard, who smart more under it than older minds, which are more callous at least, if not better provided with that defence against it, which experience and wisdom supply. Mirth and ridicule are the great means which harden the practised sinner, and which he studiously applies for making others as wicked as himself. The sort of vicious company is ridicule; of which Solomon hath said, "it is madness;" though another, not so wise as Solomon, hath said, it is the test of truth; but, without being so ingenious as the one, or so wise as the other, we may truly say, it is the destruction of virtue.

The mirth which attends vicious company, perverts the judgment, and shocks the sober resolutions that are built upon it. We then see the same objects in a different light, and in a different dress, from that,
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in which cool and solitary reason sets them before us ; and, if we think at all on such occasions, we think ourselves too rigid in a grave attachment to that, which, we then fancy we feel, does not deserve it, and are immediately inclined to throw aside resolutions, which we find are unbecoming, and serve only to make us ridiculous.

But, can there be greater absurdity, as well as greater mischief than this?—to run into vice, that we may take shelter from ridicule, and choose rather to be miserable than be thought tasteless? Are they not mad, who throw aside their virtue to join a laugh, rather than keep it, and withstand one?

It was doubtless his observation of such behaviour, which made Solomon say, “ it was better to go into the house of mourning, than into the house of mirth,” as the latter naturally tends to dissipate those serious resolutions, which the former as naturally encourage.— Could Solomon have seen our modern companies of mirth, he would not have withdrawn his reflection, but, in proportion to the greater advancement of profligate folly and madness attending them, would

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would have heightened his advice for avoiding them.

It might be both tedious and fruitless, to pursue such observations on this topic as it easily supplies, and to shew, that the gay companies of the present age are within reach of the Psalmist's description in the words of my text; and that they are happy, who walk not in their counsel, who stand not in their way, and who take no place in their seats. Such companies are the bane of virtue, and the nurseries of vice—they enervate every good disposition, and strengthen every vicious one, by employing, what they call their *wit*, but which all sober men will more justly call their *wickedness*, in recommendation and support of vice, and in the mockery and contempt of virtue and religion.

But — “if sinners entice thee, consent thou not” — join not in their merriment, lest it betray thee to think favourably of their folly, and lend not an ear to their representations, whilst thy mirth only, and not thy reason, is awake to hear them; neither be discouraged or seduced by their ridicule, but learn to set the frowns of an offended God against the

the riotous laugh of empty finners — and remember — a day will come, when these scenes of folly must give place to the solemn scene of judgment — when the majesty of Christ shall appear to vindicate the religion which he once taught, which wicked men have rejected and despised, but which will then appear too terrible to be laughed at — whilst vice, which had once put on her smiles, to seduce unwary finners to her embraces, shall be clothed with horrors — and grasp them to their destruction.

S E R M O N LXX.

CHRIST'S TEMPTATION.

MATTHEW iv. i.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the Devil.

JESUS retired into the wilderness in obedience to the direction of the Holy Spirit; which may serve to shew us, that, when men retire from the world, and shut themselves up in solitude, they should have some authority for so doing. We are intended for society; and a sequestered life seems hardly allowable, but after men have discharged, or where it is necessary in order to discharge, the duties of a public one,

This transaction may also serve to shew us, that we are not out of the reach of God's grace, or abandoned by him, when we feel ourselves exposed to great temptations; since Christ, who was filled with the Divine Spirit at his baptism by John, was immediately conducted by the same Spirit to encounter with the greatest. It is not our fault, but the condition of our spiritual warfare here, that we meet with temptations; — our duty lies in resisting them; and our comfort arises from a strenuous discharge of this duty.

Jesus, in this transaction, is led up to a personal conference with that enemy, whose works he was come to destroy; to convince us of the reality of such a being, and of the nature, as well as the reality, of his enmity; that he chooses to conduct it, not so much by open force, as by secret guile. The devil had been too successful in his guile, when he deceived our first parents; and it is a circumstance extremely well suited to our Saviour's purpose of vanquishing the devil, and restoring what was lost by man's yielding to his temptations, to shew him at last a man, who was superior to them, and to recover, in the wilderness, the fall which had been made in the garden of Eden,

But,

But, the history says, that Jesus did not meet with the devil's temptations, till he had been forty days in the wilderness; from whence we may conclude, that one part of Christ's design in his retirement was to take the opportunity of religious meditation and prayer, as a suitable preparation for the ministry on which he was entering. Admitting that Christ needed not such duty, which, however, we often find him applying, his conduct points out a beneficial lesson to us who do need it. But, Christ was in all circumstances, sin only excepted, like ourselves; and as he had recourse to the proper food of the soul, as well as of the body, we may conclude he felt the infirmities of the one, as well as of the other.

The present season calls us to the duty of religious meditation and prayer; and we are the more concerned to comply with this duty, as we have more to do in it, than Christ had to do; besides preparing ourselves for future duty, which was what Christ had to do, we have to repent of past transgressions, which certainly was no part of Christ's religious meditations.

Christ's abstinence was miraculous; and therefore no object of strict imitation; yet,

though we cannot submit to a total abstinence from food, we may abstain from the luxuries of it; and, by denying ourselves those sensual enjoyments, which inflame the passions, and feed our vices, may preserve that cool disposition of mind, which best adapts us for religious meditation; in which we may seriously pursue the dictates of reason and religion; and, by impartially considering what we are, and what we ought to be, may furnish ourselves with such directions of duty, and such resolutions of following them, as may enable us to return to the world with fresh strength for resisting the temptations which will meet us there.

Men may think, they can do very well without having recourse to this duty; and that they are not the better for such formal observances; but they may soon feel themselves the worse for a neglect of them. To let our follies pass as they happen, and not sometimes resume them for a serious consideration, is dangerous; because it not only makes us forget what are past, but teaches us to look upon those before us with less distaste; the former of which is inconsistent with our condition, as we are accountable for our past sins, the latter is inconsistent with the obligation

obligation we are under of improving our future behaviour. If we are accountable for our past sins, we should doubtless have them within view; and, in order to bring in a fair account of them, should produce them with a suitable repentance to atone for them; and, if we would make an improvement in our future conduct, we should doubtless take care, how we weaken our distaste to those vices and follies which debase it.

In the career of life, we must sometimes stop, to ask ourselves what we are doing; and where we are going. In youth we set off with speed, the pleasures of life promote our alacrity, and, in the height of spirits, we are regardless where we are tending; but when we are arrived about the middle of our age, we feel ourselves a little out of breath; and seeing the end of it before us, we pause; — we grow serious — but we cannot stop — we then begin to think, how we are prepared for entering upon a country, the confines of which begin to open on our view. This situation forces us to reflect on what we are doing; in all situations of life it is our duty to do it; not only our future happiness, but the propriety, the stability, of our daily conduct depends upon it. Our actions are so

connected with each other, that we easily slide from better to worse, without perceiving it, unless we now and then stop to examine their connection, and to interrupt it where it leads to mischief. Besides, the virtues and vices, that are scattered up and down human life, will be apt to mislead our choice, if we do not sometimes take them from the hurry of action, and try them by a calm reflection; for action disguises the objects we are concerned with; that which tempts us with all the force of an example, when our spirits are high in pursuit of the business or pleasures of life, appears quite otherwise, when examined by the judgment, in the cool season of reflection. The lessons of our duty too will be forgot, unless frequently perused; for though they are written in the tables of the heart, yet the variety of other impressions, that are made there, requires a steady attention, to separate and peruse them right.

So useful is the duty of religious meditation — and so necessary is it that we should sometimes sit down to trim the lamp which lights us on our way to happiness. God has given every man such a share of natural judgment, and religion affords such means for the cultivation of it, as, when
rightly

rightly employed, is sufficient for directing us to that duty, which is expected from us; and the principal errors observable among us arise from a neglect of this light, more than from a want of it. We are too apt to use it, as a light, which, after it has once shewn us our path, we may dismiss, and pursue our journey with security; but we must constantly apply it to our steps, if we would walk with safety, nor can we set it aside, but at the hazard of a fall. It is the mischievous effect of the pleasures of life, and too often of its business, that they cheat us of this light; as it is the advantageous effect of religious meditation that it helps us to recover it.

The application of this duty lies not so much in retiring from the world, as in retiring into our own hearts. A good man can feel himself alone in the midst of company—not that all places are equally fit for religious meditation; but affected solitude is not necessary for pursuing it. Good thoughts will find their way, if we will give them leave; and we more often want inclination, than leisure, to attend them. Solitude is no farther a security than as we make a proper use of it; for it will not screen us from the attacks of
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the devil ; who often finds easier success, when he surprizes us alone, than when he attacks us in public ; — for the multitude has its guards for virtue, as well as its temptations to vice ; and the eye of the world will restrain those passions, which retirement tempts men to indulge. In short, those who seek solitude without proper dispositions, will hardly turn it to a good account ; and those who are already furnished with such dispositions need not affect it, yet will be most benefited by the use of it. He who seeks retirement merely to avoid vice, may find himself mistaken ; but he who seeks it with a disposition and desire to improve his virtue, will find the benefits which naturally belong to it. He will find, that a sober retirement smooths and strengthens the mind, which is apt to be ruffled and enervated by the vanities of the world ; and that there is this use in stepping sometimes out of a croud, that we better see by that means how to conduct ourselves through it : our thoughts are at liberty for recollecting the several suggestions, which may direct and animate us in the discharge of our duty ; and our natural judgment, which, before, was either neglected or misapplied, now recovers its exercise, and, though we are
I alone,

alone, we feel within us the advice of a friend, who is ready to assist us, and who has all along not been so properly absent from us, as unemployed.

The proper business of religious meditation may at first give us pain; men are loth to look into their hearts, because they are afraid of what they may find there; but the necessity of this duty calls us to it, and the advantage attending it encourages us to undertake it. A serious repentance for past sins is a necessary step for obtaining pardon of them, and a natural guard against a repetition of them; and the more attentively we recollect how we have been betrayed by former temptations, the better prepared shall we be for withstanding future ones.

But the business of religious retirement is not merely to look back on our past failures, but to look forward to our future improvement. There is one exercise of the mind, the most adapted to this purpose, which we can hardly apply in the bustle of the world, at least which is best applied in retirement from it—I mean, the contemplation of heaven, and the happiness we shall enjoy there, if we deserve it:—there is not, within the compass

compass of our thoughts, so effectual a check to temptation, or so strong an incitement to goodness, as this object, when it is suffered to shew itself to the mind, and the mind is warmed in its attention to it. Whenever we feel the devil busy about us, the surest way to get out of his reach is, to fly up to heaven, for thither he dares not follow us; and whilst our mind is employed there, we shall look down with indignation on the attempts he is making to deprive us of the happiness, which we see God has provided for us; and we shall descend from the contemplation with fresh vigour and resolution to avoid every vice that would spoil us of it, and to look for every virtue that may qualify us to deserve it. The mind in this situation sees at once, as from an eminence, the littleness of human life in comparison with eternity; the futility of its greatest blessings in comparison with true happiness in the next world; and the madness of losing our title to that happiness, in the trifles, the dirt, the miseries of the present. Under this contemplation we shall no otherwise regret the shortness of life, than as it shortens our opportunity of doing good and deserving happiness, which will of course urge us to make the best use of our time whilst we are here,

and

and to be diligent in goodness. And for the vices and troubles of life—the mind that is fixed on heaven, and contemplates its seat there, defies the one and sustains the other; it defies the momentary vices, that would spoil its eternal happiness—and it knows how to sustain those troubles, which, besides that they are of short duration, tend at once to improve its virtue and to enhance its reward,

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S E R M O N LXXI.

The same Subject continued.

MATTHEW iv. 3.

When the Tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

UNDER such contemplations as religion and retirement may set before us, we feel ourselves guarded against temptations, and open for improvement in goodness; yet when we get into the world, and the devil has to do with us, he exhibits things to us in a different view.

We are going to see, what views he exhibited to our Saviour, and with what artful conduct he laid his temptations before him; and

and though we cannot hope for that strength and constancy, with which our Saviour withstood them, yet it will give us an advantage, to be shewn the craft, with which the devil proposes them, and we may, from discerning the conduct of our enemy, learn to direct our own. For the temptations our Saviour met with, were not so peculiar to him, as to admit of no application to ourselves. The devil's proposals were particular, but the maxims on which he made them were general, such as he uses on all occasions, and with too much success, upon mankind.

After an abstinence from food for forty days, Christ felt the uneasiness of hunger. In this situation the Tempter thought him a fit subject of his trial; and accordingly attacks him with this address — “If thou be
“ the Son of God.”

From whence we must not suppose, that the Tempter had any notion, that Jesus was the Son of God in his divine nature; the Tempter certainly hoped for success in this transaction, and therefore must set himself to work, upon a presumption, that the person he had to deal with was capable of being seduced; but such presumption he could not have, if he supposed, that the person he had

to deal with was God. The devil had heard the declaration from heaven, when John was baptizing Jesus in Jordan, and knew that he was an immediate minister and favourite of God, invested with a commission of extraordinary import; but he knew not, that he, who was thus commissioned, was any greater person than a man; this was the circumstance that encouraged his malice; — as the declarations in favour of Jesus gave the Tempter to understand some important good intentions in his coming, so his opinion that he was but man gave him hopes, from experience, that he might frustrate them.

The Tempter begins his attack very artfully upon two points — “ If thou be the
“ Son of God, command that these stones be
“ made bread.”

He challenges Jesus to give a proof of his character, and such a one, as might at the same time supply the means of removing the uneasiness he felt. To challenge any one's character, who has credentials to support it, and to set bread before one who feels a disposition to eat, are, separately, strong temptations, but much stronger when they act together.

As God had usually distinguished his messengers by a power of working miracles, the Tempter thought it a plausible proposal to call Jesus to this test of his character; and this he proposed, as an introduction to what he principally intended, which was, thereby to lay Jesus under a temptation of breaking through the duty of his present condition. This is the devil's great maxim of guile, to dignify his proposals by specious appearances—he often makes even virtue itself an introduction to vice.

As to the question—How far the devil's proposals had the effect of a temptation upon Jesus?—perhaps we had better not meddle with it. Bishop Sherlock, on this subject, advises—to ‘keep at a distance from such ‘nice questions, which no man enters into ‘with discretion, or gets out of with advantage.’ Yet, without approaching too near to this question, I think I may venture to say—

That the purity and perfection of Jesus will not allow us to suppose he felt any disposition to comply with the devil's proposal; nor is it inconsistent with his being truly man, that he had no such disposition; for

it is not a necessary, though it be a common, condition in the nature of man, to feel a disposition towards what is wrong. Christ was made "like unto us in all things, sin only excepted;" we may therefore allow, that he felt the natural infirmities belonging to man, as hunger and thirst, pain and weariness; but we cannot allow, that he felt such moral infirmities as carry in them a disposition to sin. That Jesus had frequent recourse to prayer, was not in consequence of his feeling such moral infirmities — it was not to defeat wrong dispositions, but to promote good ones. And when he was exposed to the devil's temptations, he was not less truly a man, because he felt no disposition to comply with his proposals; nor were the temptations themselves less truly such, on that account; good men often meet with proposals to sin, to which they feel no disposition, which, being meant as temptations, are properly called so, though they be not felt as such.

Jesus rejects the Tempter's proposal with this reply — "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God."

Three things are remarkable in this reply of our Saviour's.

1. One is, that he answers the Tempter by a passage from scripture. Thus he answers in the character of a man; which shews he understood himself to be questioned in that character. The reply itself plainly shews as much. Jesus tells the Tempter — “Man shall not live by bread alone:”—this answer directly suits the devil’s notion of our Saviour’s being a man, but does by no means suit his notion of our Saviour’s being God.

2. Another thing observable in our Saviour’s reply is, that he takes no notice of the challenge which the devil gave to his character, but directs his reply to the end which was proposed by it. Our Saviour does not tell the Tempter, he had no need to prove himself the Son of God—but, that he had no need of bread to sustain him. The case was this—the exact point of duty, which lay before Jesus in his present situation, was a trust in God; he had retired into the wilderness, in obedience to the direction of the Holy Spirit, and it was a necessary part of that obedience, if any difficulty beset him, to depend upon his care, whose will had brought him in the way of it. It was no part of Jesus’s present business to execute the commission, with which he came forth from the Father; and, consequently,

quently, this was no season for producing the proper credentials of it. Upon this account our Saviour paid no regard to the devil's challenge for producing them; but, so far as the proposal touched the proper duty of our Saviour in his present situation, and tended to withdraw him from that trust in the care of God, which he was concerned to shew, so far he carries his reply, and no farther.

3. The like reason will explain a third circumstance observable in our Saviour's reply, which is, that he speaks not of himself, as capable to produce a miraculous supply of food in his present exigency, but refers such action to the power of God; agreeable still to that duty of trust in God, which he was now called upon to shew, as well as suitable to that concealment of his own divine power, which it was not yet his time to exhibit. As it was at present out of time for Jesus to work a miracle, it was not necessary for him to shew the devil he had it in his power to work one; as his present point of duty was, to shew a trust in the protection of God, the application of his own divine power to his relief had been improper, and therefore the declaration of having such power was unnecessary.

Thus our Saviour baffled the Tempter's first

attack; and hath set us this useful lesson by his conduct under it — that we are to trust in God, under those difficulties to which his providence thinks fit to call us, and not apply improper methods for our relief, how much soever they may be in our power.

The devil failed in his attempt upon our Saviour, but he pursues his purposes with more success against mankind. He walks not indeed visibly among us; he does not accost us with a personal address, as he approached our Saviour; but we find the same proposals made to our hearts, which were offered to him, and though we see not the Tempter, we sensibly feel his temptations.

He is ever vigilant to find us in distress, and, on such occasions, never fails acquainting us with the power we have in our hands for surmounting it. The pain we feel makes us look with eagerness at every proposal of relief, and if we are once persuaded we have a power of reaching it, the devil too often finds an easy work in drawing us to a compliance. And it is a favourite maxim with him, to seduce us first into distress, that he may the better secure us for his prey; — and the plot succeeds but too well — the distresses, which our own folly pulls down upon us, are most
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uneasy,

uneasy, and when we have once listened to the devil's temptations in making ourselves miserable, we are the most prepared for listening to them in attempting to make ourselves easy.

Yet, where he finds us, not in distresses of our own procuring, he is well content to find us under those which Providence hath thought fit to lay upon us; — here too he works us to impatience, prompts the heart with unbecoming sentiments upon the conduct of Providence, and, at last, draws us to the dangerous experiment of turning stones into bread — of applying improper methods for our relief.

But let us always remember *who* rejected this experiment, and *why* he rejected it. Jesus trusted in God, that he would sustain him under those difficulties to which he had called him; and man, for whose benefit and instruction Jesus acted and suffered, as he has reason to expect the like appointments from God, should shew the like behaviour under them.

This life is a state of trial — and distress may be our lot. To be impatient under it, shews a weak resentment at feeling our share in God's wise distribution of work to man; but to cut out our own deliverance, through the duty which God hath

set about us, affronts his authority, and is an attempt to defeat his purposes; who sends his afflictions, as he sends his blessings, with a view to some wise and good end—and whose right in sending afflictions carries with it a right of taking his own time for the removal of them.

Each of us will apply this lesson to our private personal distresses, when they fall upon us!—and, a lamentable truth it is, that, in these times, many feel a call to such application. Private distresses, multiplied, become public distress, which raises public discontent; and *that* never takes the true way for relief; because it presently throws away that which should best procure it—prudence, in the use of our own powers, and religion, in our submission to, and dependance upon, the power and will of Providence. Under this disposition, men seek no will but their own, and will apply every power within their reach, however contrary to the will of Providence;—no stones so hard, but they will attempt to make bread of them—no duty so express, but they will break through it to get what they aim at.—But let us consider a little.—“He who sitteth in heaven” will laugh men to scorn,” when he sees them so eager and spirited in laying hold of those
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those means for their relief, which he has appointed for their ruin.

Whatever may be the sentiments of those, who call that *distress*, which is but the disappointment of ambition and avarice, and who bid defiance to religion, justice, and humanity, to come at what they do not *want*, but *wish for*, and, in consequence of such free spirit, would ruin their country to serve, or to revenge, themselves; and make others miserable, because they are not great; — whatever, I say, be the sentiments of those who thus pull down mischief on the public, let us, who must suffer under their ascendancy — (it may be justly, for our own offences) — let us look upon it as a distress, in which Providence hath thought fit to place us, and remember the example of our Saviour, who, under his distress, though hungry, would not turn stones into bread; — let us not be restless and turbulent, but let us return to our duty, every man in his place, and be quiet. Let us not be confident in ourselves, nor fearful of those “who have evil will at Sion.” — Let us do our duty, and trust in him who never faileth those who love, and diligently seek him. This if we do, God will withhold “the wild boar from breaking

again

“ again into the vineyard, which his right
“ hand hath planted”—and will not suffer
the civil and religious establishment of this
kingdom to be again broke down and trampled
under foot—by those who hate it.

SERMON

S E R M O N LXXII.

The same Subject continued.

MATTHEW iv. 5.

*Then the devil taketh him, and setteth him on
a pinnacle of the temple.*

THE Tempter, in his next attack upon Jesus, changes his ground, and, having in vain tried to make him mistrust the divine care, would next lead him to abuse it.

The history says, “ The devil taketh up
“ Jesus, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the
“ temple;” nor was it beneath Christ’s dignity
to permit this, any more than it was afterwards, when he submitted to much worse treatment from the Jews.—That the devil is permitted to exert his power over the persons of men, and good men too, the scripture sufficiently testifies. The story of Job, as well

as the event before us, sets out this to our notice ; and there arises this useful reflection from it ; — that, as we see how far the power of the devil can reach, so we have reason to be thankful for the protection of God, who carefully restrains it from molesting us.

The devil setteth Jesus on a pinnacle of the temple, and says to him — “ If thou be the
“ Son of God, cast thyself down ; for it is
“ written, He shall give his angels charge
“ concerning thee, and in their hands they
“ shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou hurt
“ thy foot against a stone.”

The passage in scripture, which the Tempter quotes, is taken from the Psalmist ; who, in his general description of God's care over the righteous, declares this protection over them : and this declaration, which contains a promise of God's protection over good men, in the discharge of their duty, and under dangers which fall in the way of it, the Tempter here artfully extends to those dangers, with which they have no concern ; he makes that a promise of protection under all actions, which is meant only of good ones ; and would infer a deliverance from dangers of our own seeking, because God has promised to protect us under those which may fall in our way.

Jesus

Jesus answers this proposal, as he did the other, from scripture, and tells the devil, "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." The sentence hath reference to the behaviour of the Israelites in the wilderness, when they mutinously demanded more proofs of the divine care, after they had already been supplied with what was abundantly sufficient; and Jesus, by giving it in answer to the Tempter, tells him thus much — that he was fully satisfied of the truth of his own character; nor less convinced of the divine care to protect him; that, therefore, it would be as unbecoming in him, as it was in the Israelites, to tempt God, by soliciting him for more proofs of his care than are necessary.

Our Saviour's example under this temptation, carries with it a lesson of great use and extent. It recommends that disposition of mind, which is so convinced of the care of God's providence as to trust in it, but not so confident as to tempt it. — The means of our daily preservation sufficiently convince us of his care; nor are they to be looked upon, merely as proofs of God's care, but also as trials of our own; and when we rightly apply what

what God sets before us, and from his favour and goodness expect the success of our application, this is properly a trust in God, and his providence; but when we neglect, or misuse, the blessings of his care, upon a presumption, that he will still support us, this is not *trusting* in his providence but *tempting* it; — as if we were not content, that God protects us like a careful father, unless he attends us with the obsequiousness of a servant. It is surely sufficient, if God protects us, in the business which his wisdom appoints us, without following us through the various and mischievous projects, which our own folly may suggest.

The devil draws a pernicious use from this temper of mankind; for, by putting them upon expecting unreasonable instances of the care of Providence, their disappointment makes them regardless of the reasonable proofs that are before them; and this leads them to be dissatisfied with God's protection; and when once they are made angry at God's providence, it is easy to make them rebellious against his authority; and, after withdrawing their allegiance, they are glad to part with their faith; — and thus he leads them on to deny there is a God,

a God, because he does not answer the capricious demands of their folly, and protect them under difficulties of their own procuring.

Our great care should be, to confine our attention to the business, in which Providence has placed us — and to distinguish the dangers, which naturally belong to it, from those which, though they may *attend* it, do not *belong* to it, but are adventitiously fetched in by the too extensive reach of our passions. We are always safe, at least shall always be supported, in following where God and our duty calls us; but when we flatter ourselves into an opinion, of such an unlimited care of Providence as will always watch and protect us, whether we are obeying the call of duty, or the call of folly, whether we are doing God's work, or the work of the devil, we do God great dishonour, and betray ourselves into mischief — we make the God of wisdom the patron of folly, and feed ourselves with encouragement for pursuing wherever our passions lead us.

We come now to the devil's last temptation of our Saviour, which is grounded on a different motive, and directed to a different object from the other two.

He taketh our Saviour " up into an exceeding
" high

“ high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them ;
“ and saith unto him — All these things will
“ I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and
“ worship me.” It is both difficult and useless to guess at, what the Evangelist hath not explained, the *manner* in which the Tempter shewed our Saviour all the kingdoms of the world ; whether by a visual display of them, or (which seems more likely) by discourse ; — the temptation was the same, and the lesson we are to draw from it is the same under either manner. The design in recording the transaction was not to acquaint us with the natural powers of superior beings, how they can operate in tempting us ; but to suggest our own moral powers in withstanding their temptations ; — the one is matter of mere curiosity, the other is matter of duty and importance.

This offer is quite suitable to the character of him who made it, who was a liar from the beginning ; the offer, which the Tempter here makes to our Saviour of all the kingdoms of the earth, implies an assertion, that he had a right and a power to dispose of them — which he had not — for, “ the earth is
“ the Lord’s, and all that therein is.”

Our

Our Saviour answers this proposal with more warmth than he answered the other. They were all insults upon his own constancy and patience; but this was moreover a blasphemous insult upon the majesty of God. The Tempter, in this last proposal, makes a full discovery of himself, and, by endeavouring to obtain adoration from Christ, appears to be that evil spirit, who had boldly set himself up in opposition to God. Christ, who knew him from the first, did not call him by his name, till this last proposal brought with it an explicit declaration of his pretensions and character. Christ answers him thus—"Get thee behind me, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

We may observe here, that Christ directs his answer to the purpose with which the offer was made, not to the falshood on which it stood; because, could the Tempter have made out his right to the dominion which he offered, Christ would nevertheless have rejected the terms on which it was offered, and therefore it was a more satisfactory way of answering the Tempter's proposal, to reject him as a rebel, than to prove him a liar. Accordingly, Christ answers him with an express

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declaration of God's right—not to the kingdoms of the earth—but to the worship and duty of its inhabitants; and this he does in a manner, which left him no hope of succeeding in this attack, and which gave him no encouragement to apply any more.—He found he was known, and he retires—a piece of prudence, in which his pupils frequently forget to copy him.

The Devil, who knew how to conduct his temptations with judgment, leaves the strongest for the last. His first proposal was built upon the distress under which he saw our Saviour, and he tempted him by proposing a method for supplying the necessities of life; his last proposal applies to the passions, and he tempts him with an offer of the superfluities of life.—However severe the necessities of life may be, they are a less effectual temptation to sin, than the superfluities of it. In distress, our desires are confined to what we feel; in higher life we covet what we see: our view is contracted, whilst we are in the vale of misery; but the higher we ascend, the more the prospect opens upon us, and a greater variety of objects appear to tempt our desires. It was from the mountain top that the devil laid his strongest temptation before our Saviour;—

Saviour;—and when we are raised to that height, from whence we have the world, and its allurements, in full view before us, we are most in danger of being seduced. The passions then become the ruling principle; which hurry us with more impetuosity after the vanities and superfluities of life, than necessity urges us to the conveniences of it; for real necessity is easily gratified, and, when gratified, is quiet; the passions are not so easily gratified, and, what is worse, they heighten their demands, in proportion as they are gratified.

The devil sets the picture of the world before mankind with more success than he set it before our Saviour; he points out the wealth, the honour, the power, the pleasure, it contains, and makes us run with implicit obedience through the conditions, which he appoints us for obtaining them.

But let us stop, and reflect a little.

The devil was a liar from the beginning, and will be so to the end. He proposed a state of knowledge to our first parents, which was as much beyond his power to give, as it was beyond their reach to take: he offered our Saviour kingdoms, which he had neither right nor power to dispose of; and he daily proposes

to mankind more than he has either intention or ability to bestow. This many find to their cost, who comply with his dictates in expectation of advantages, which they never gain, or, if they reap that fruit of their wickedness which they expected, get with it that punishment which they did not expect, but which they well deserve. If the devil can tempt us from duty by a promise, he gains his end, and is as little solicitous as he is able to make good his promise; this is cold encouragement for entering into his service, whose view is to disappoint and ruin those he employs, and should direct us to another master, who sets us at work, to make us happy, and never sets us at work, without a certainty of a reward for our faithful discharge of it.

When, therefore, the picture of the world is spread before us, as it was before our Saviour, let us endeavour to imitate his example upon the view of it. It will be prudent at least not to be immediately enamoured with it, but to demur upon the view—yet, not long—our Saviour might deign to look at this picture; but *we* cannot stay to gaze at it without the utmost hazard.—Not that the objects we admire in it are all, and always, of the devil's drawing, and at his disposal; the world is
God's,

God's, wherein he appoints mankind their duties and their blessings; — but there are marks which distinguish these objects, and which should always direct our conduct — When wealth, power, honour, or pleasure, the capital figures in the picture of the world — when these are stamp'd with vice, and not to be purchased but at the price of religion and virtue — they are the devil's merchandize — and if we traffic we are ruined.

When this is the case — away at once with the Tempter, and his temptation —
“Get thee behind me, Satan — I will worship God, and him only will I serve.”

—these are the devil's merchandise—
be purchased but at the price of religion and
yet that is fraught with vice and horror
eternal prison in the picture of the world.
When wealth, power, honour or pleasure, the
which should always direct our conduct—
marks which distinguish the objects and
values and their blessings;—but there are
God's wisdom be applied, mankind that

...and him only will I love.

This is a blank, aged, cream-colored page, likely an endpaper or flyleaf of a book. The paper has a slightly textured appearance with some minor discoloration and small dark spots, possibly due to age or handling. A faint vertical crease is visible down the center of the page.

SECRET

1944

S E R M O N LXXIII.

The same Subject continued.

MATTHEW iv. II.

Then the Devil leaveth him, and behold Angels came and ministered unto him.

THE Gospel for the day hath shewn us the several temptations, which the Devil set before our Saviour in the wilderness, and how effectually he surmounted them. The Evangelist closes his account of this transaction with telling us, that the devil, thus defeated, left our Saviour, and Angels came, and ministered unto him.

So will it fare with us; if we strenuously resist the temptations, which come before us in the course of our duty. The more we refuse to comply with them, the more they will cease to molest us; and we shall feel that com-

fort, and strength, in our minds, which is, at once, the effect and the support of our constancy.

We are all exposed to temptations; bad men easily fall into them; and good men, sometimes, hardly withstand them. It is true, that a regular course of life, or our stations in the world, may set us out of the reach of many temptations, which others meet with; yet, I doubt, there are few, whose dispositions are so happily formed, or so carefully regulated, but they feel some treacherous affection or other at work upon their virtue. Nor are any so securely placed in the repose of life, that they are safe from rough accidents that may disturb it—from those uneasinesses which grow up even in the enjoyments of the world, and which often prove more detrimental to virtue, than even calamities themselves.

Careless minds regard not this circumstance of human frailty; but good minds lament it. The more eagerly any one pursues virtue, the more it vexes him to be haunted with temptations, which he is frequently obliged to stop and struggle with;—and, in a gloomy hour, he may be inclined to mistrust his safety, and the favour of God, and complain, that his

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Holy Spirit deserts him, and leaves him a prey to temptations.

But consider—Was not our Saviour tempted? and will any good man complain, that he is so? Was our Saviour deserted by the Holy Spirit in that situation, when it was the Holy Spirit who led him up to it?—and that too, immediately after he had received the fulness of the Spirit at his baptism.—Why then should any good man suspect he is deserted of God, when he finds himself attacked by temptations?

It is not the being tempted, but the yielding to temptation, which should alarm us; the former was our Saviour's case; the latter, if we be careful, need not be ours; for we have assistance within reach, if we will use it. So far is the grace of God from deserting us under temptation, that it is ever ready to help us, in proportion to our trial;—but then we must follow its dictates; we must not run contrary to the secret suggestions of duty we feel within us, which are the voice of God's Spirit; if we do, it is not the Spirit who deserts us, but it is we who desert the Spirit; and then, indeed, our case becomes truly blameable, and truly dangerous:—but, if we resolutely follow its dictates, we are safe, though
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we are tried; and shall find no reason to complain, either of God, who has called us to a work which he has enabled us to perform, or of ourselves, that we have felt temptations which we have resisted.

Amidst the ordinary temptations of the world, which are busy at every post of duty, we shall find assistance from our reason to withstand them, if we will follow it, and still more from our religion, if we attend to what that communicates and sets before us.

As to reason, however it may be stronger in some men than in others, it is strong enough in every man, who has not destroyed it, to shew him his duty, and the consequences of performing or transgressing it. And as to Divine grace, which our religion communicates, to quicken and strengthen our rational faculty, every honest Christian, who uses the means appointed for obtaining it, will feel enough of it for making him a good man.

Some may think, that of these two means, for guarding us against temptations, and keeping us to duty, our reason is sufficient, and that religion, with the grace it communicates, is unnecessary.—In a matter of so great importance, where our eternal happiness depends upon our duty, a prudent man will apply every

every means that comes within his reach, for assisting him in a proper discharge of it; and if he has good grounds for expecting assistance from religion, and the Divine grace it communicates, in this work, he will not stop to argue whether he can do without it, but will gladly set himself to the means of obtaining it, and doing all he can with it.

We cannot set the great truths of the Christian religion before the mind, but the heart will feel something. This is so true, that we see with what industry some have attempted, though in vain, to disprove and set aside those truths. Those then, who believe them, must feel themselves affected by them; and what they feel, if followed, will enable them to withstand temptations. Even those who disbelieve them, I had rather say, who affect to disbelieve them, must allow, that, supposing them to be true, they are very suitably adapted for withholding men from sin, and strengthening them against temptation.

The great blessing of our redemption—the manner in which it was wrought—and the promises it contains, cannot employ our serious attention, without giving us a disgust to sin, if not a dread of it;—sensations, which, if we follow them, will prompt us to fly with
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all our speed from its contagion. The human affections of self-love and gratitude (the former of which all men feel, and the latter no man cares to be thought destitute of,) will bestir themselves, under the serious and attentive contemplation of what Christ hath done and promised for us; and whilst our contemplation upon it holds its force and warmth within us, no sin will prevail upon us to frustrate Christ's love, and our own happiness.—Any temptations we may struggle with, must lose their hold upon us, when we consider the folly and mischief of them, under a belief of the Gospel of Christ, with our title to heaven full before us, (which such temptations would rob us of) and sensible, that God's Holy Spirit is at hand, offering us his help to keep it.—Under these impressions, I say, the mind resents the obstruction, which temptation throws in our way; and, by an effort, in which the Spirit of God cherishes our good resolutions, and strengthens our faculties, we spring forward, and recover the liberty of the sons of God.

The Christian religion certainly supplies the most prevailing arguments against temptation, and the strongest motives for a good life. Reason, if well attended to, will do much in this work,

work, but religion will do more—will restrain those passions, which reason cannot silence.—They were angels, not men, who ministered to our Saviour in his temptation; and it is the Gospel, not philosophy, from whence we draw the best relief under the temptations we may meet with, and is our best security for goodness.

It matters not, if we observe some, of liberal endowments, and stations, behaving themselves, not only with decency, but with some goodness, who borrow no assistance for their behaviour from a religion they despise. Considering such men, as they would chuse to be considered, as behaving upon the strength of their own good sense and use of natural religion, it does not disprove the general use of the Gospel, even if we find a few behaving well in some points without it; — but let not such men value themselves as patterns of goodness—they may be free, indeed, from the vices of the world (at a time of day, though, when there are not so many things reckoned vices as there should be) — they may be men of integrity, sobriety, and benevolence.—So far is well—it is a good character; but it is short of the character of a good man. They discharge the duties they owe their neighbour and themselves;

selves; but where is their duty to God? which their natural religion so strongly sets before them—the duty of obeying Him; and, consequently, of attending to his will, whenever he thinks fit to reveal it. The despising that which offers itself as a revelation of his will, without examining it, or without being able to disprove its authority, is, undoubtedly, a great breach of the natural duty we owe to God; and, unless the honour and obedience, due to God be the most insignificant part of our duty, such a breach of it sets them as much beneath the character of good men, as any transgression of the duty they owe their neighbour would do.

But they tell us—they can combat temptation, without help from the Gospel.

It is well; and they should thank God that he has given them strength of reason for the work. But no man's reason is so full in strength, as not to admit the assistance of religion; and that work is the most secure, which receives the most assistance that may be admitted in the execution of it. Men, too, may be deceived; if not in what they have done, yet in what they may hereafter do. Our powers of reason are different, at different seasons, and under different circumstances; and, after

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we have withstood strong temptations, we may yield to weak ones. This, indeed, may be the case, even under the assistance of religion, added to our reason; for though the influence of religion on the mind be powerful, it is not irresistible; and if this danger may not be wholly removed, by calling in religion, it will certainly be increased by excluding its assistance; which, though it be not irresistible, is more fixed and steady, than the fickle operations of human reason.

But, the withstanding temptation, however it may be a part of a good man's duty, is not the whole of a good man's character. The better men are, the less they have of this work; in which though these men may sometimes succeed, yet, for improvement in goodness, and lighting up in the heart a love of God, and religion, with the hopes of heaven — for these, I say, they are yet to seek; nor must they seek them in the uncomfortable tracts of human philosophy, but in the bright regions of the Gospel of Christ; the precepts and promises of which are a rich supply of virtue and of hope.

And it is in this use of our religion, when we apply the truths it contains not merely for our security, but for our improvement, that
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we experience the wisdom and strength it communicates. The mind that is intent on our Saviour's example of goodness and purity, as it will scarce attend to the very best and highest human examples, that ever lived, or were ever fancied, so it will most surely detest all bad examples it may meet with ; it will wish, it will try, to live like Christ ; but will never be drawn to live like those who despise or neglect him. The precepts and instructions of the Gospel—so plain, that they are easily understood, so proper to our nature, that they are felt, as well as understood—coming from so divine a teacher, and so amiable an example, must fall with such persuasive force into the heart, that the best human eloquence, laid out upon them, comparatively seems cold and feeble. Then the promises of the Gospel are such, built on so sure a foundation, and rising up to heaven, that they must needs fortify us against whatever may arise to defeat them, and lead us, with alacrity, in the true way to their accomplishment.—In short, the mind that is intent on the blessing of our redemption through Christ, and the promises of his Gospel ; that is busy to follow his steps, through the precepts he taught, to the glory he has purchased for us, scarce observes, is not disturbed

disturbed by what passes around him here.—
In the steady course of a good Christian life,
there is that composure of mind, that strength
of heart, that joy in view—which make men
superior to whatever may assail them;—even
affliction loses of its weight :—but how des-
picable, must temptation appear, when we
see the gates of heaven open to our view,
and when we *feel* the Holy Spirit of God
conducting us to them !

S E R M O N LXXIV.

THE DUTY OF HUMILIATION.

JAMES IV. 10.

Humble yourselves in the sight of God, and He shall lift you up.

THE church, with much propriety, hath appointed, that, previous to our commemoration of Christ's passion and resurrection, we should prepare ourselves by humiliation and repentance; for, as Christ "died for our sins, and rose again for our justification," it is very fit we should meet so signal a blessing with a disposition which qualifies us to receive it.—The work of Christ's redemption is built on this circumstance—that we are sinners;—and therefore we must acknowledge ourselves such, to come within the benefit of it: and, as the terms of our re-

E c 2 redemption,

demption, on our part, are—repentance of our sins, and faith in the pardon which Christ hath wrought—we must possess both, in order to be entitled to it.

To this purpose the season of Lent is set apart; that, by calling our thoughts from the world, and employing them in an enquiry into our own consciences, we may sincerely repent of what is amiss there, and, applying ourselves to the merits of Christ for pardon, set ourselves with fresh resolutions to our duty.

This work naturally sets before us the duty of *humiliation*; which I distinguish from *humility*, as that belongs to our behaviour with men—and, taking up the notion expressed in my text, I shall only consider the duty of humbling ourselves before God.

We need not look far into ourselves to find occasion for it; whether we consider our *original*, or our *condition*, each of which will send us to this duty—our original is *dust*, and our condition is *sin*: the highest among us derive from the former, and the very best among us partake of the latter. The scripture is frequent and full in reminding us of both: the first man, that he might not forget from whence he was made, had his name given him that
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was expressive of it ; and the best of men, in their addresses to God, have humbly acknowledged their original.—“ Behold now,” says Abraham, “ I have taken upon me to speak “ unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes.” —We read of holy men in scripture, who, when they bewailed their sins, and besought God for his mercy, used the ceremony of covering their heads with ashes—a ceremony, which is not so much to be contemned, for being out of use, as it is to be commended for its significant propriety ; expressing humiliation, and an acknowledgment of our original dust, and earthly generation. Nor can man do less than acknowledge himself to be that, which God expressly declares him to be ; who not only sent man from his presence after the fall, with saying, “ Dust thou art,” but, when afterwards he thought fit to speak to mankind by his Prophets, it was with this address, “ O earth, hear the word of the Lord.” He hath called us *earth*, who made us ; who best knows what we truly are, and what we should be truly called.—This then is our right name, however we may be distinguished by such style, title, or dignity, as the world, from necessity or courtesy, may think fit to give us, or by the several qualifications of power, splendor,

wealth, strength, or beauty;—to which distinctions we mutually pay suitable regard, as indeed we ought, but to which our kindred worms will pay none, when they meet us in the grave.

For there we must all descend—otherwise the meanness of our original would not be sufficient reason for our humiliation, were we continually to proceed from it to perfection, without interruption;—it then matters not how base the materials, when the work is so noble; but the humiliation is, that so noble a work, as it arose from dust, must return to dust again.—Yet so hath he decreed, whose work we are.—The Almighty voice, which declared—“Dust thou art”—in the same breath declared—“To dust shalt thou return”—and daily experience confirms the declaration.—This is owing, not to our *original*, but to our *condition*; not to our being made of dust, but to our having made ourselves sinners; and the latter is as universal a circumstance of our condition, as the former is of our original.—All flesh is grass, and all flesh are sinners. The old world, before the flood, was universally given to sin; by which the wrath of God was so provoked, that he chose the strongest manner, both of expressing, and of executing it.—

it.—He declared, “it repented him that he had “made man;” and he overwhelmed them with a deluge, as universal as their sin. Noah and his family were saved from this universal destruction, to be the parent of a new race of men, who yet soon followed the steps of the old one.—Look down through mankind from that time to the present, and then say, with St. Paul, “All men are under sin;” for though there were holy and good men of old, and I trust there are now, yet there neither were, nor are, any so holy and so good, of whom it may be said, that they are not sinners. The scripture “shutteth up all under sin.”—St. Paul calls us the “children of the wrath of God,” at our very birth, and says, we are not able to do, say, or even think any thing good, of ourselves, by our own natural inclination or abilities.

Ask now of the highest and the holiest men of old—and, I think, we shall hardly match ourselves with such;—but ask them, what they thought of themselves.

St. John Baptist, a man sanctified even before he was born, and filled from his birth with the Holy Ghost—who prepared the way for our Saviour Christ—was commended of Christ to be “more than a Prophet,” and the

greatest that ever was born of a woman—even this great and holy man, when Christ applied himself to him for baptism, said, “I have need to be baptized of thee.”—What thought he of himself when he said this? Baptism was then, and still is, understood to be a washing from sin.—Christ indeed, who “knew no sin,” came to John for baptism, yet, not because he needed it on his own account, but, as he says, because it was requisite—it became him to fulfil all righteousness, to perform all customary duties of religion. On this principle Christ complied with the ceremony of baptism from John; but John proposed to receive it from Christ on a different principle; not merely because it was *decent*, but, as he expressly says, because he *needed* it; not out of mere compliance with a religious ceremony, but for real use—to wash away sins, which he was sensible belonged to the imperfection of his nature.

After St. John Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, ask St. John the Evangelist, his favourite, what he thought of himself, when he said,—“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us
“ from

“ from all unrighteousness. — If we say we
“ have not sinned, we make him a liar, and
“ his word is not in us.”—Surely the Evangelist made this confession and declaration, not excluding himself, but in the name of himself and of all other holy and good men, be they ever so good.—It may be difficult for us to imagine, that such men as these could be sinners, yet they felt they were so, and acknowledged the duty of repentance and confession.

King David, to whom scripture gives the encomium of being a man “ after God’s heart,” was yet a man who too much followed the dictates of his own. He shewed an example, which will never want followers, that good men have their failings; but he shewed also an example which is not so much followed, of repentance for his failures. How deeply ashamed is he of his sins!—yet not ashamed to confess them. How often, how earnestly does he desire God’s mercy for his great offences, and that God would not enter into judgment with him! And at the same time, not thinking it sufficient to treat for great and open offences only, with God, who sees the least and most private, how anxious and accurate is he to examine and weigh his whole conduct,

duct, and to carry his repentance farther, than his memory, though diligent, can carry it! How has he ransacked and sought into the number of his sins, when we find him, not desperately, but with humble piety, giving up his search, and declaring, after earnest and deep contemplation of his sins, that “they
 “are more in number than the hairs of his
 “head, and his heart faileth him”—to recount them—but not to ask pardon of God for them.—In this situation, though we see David as a good and pious man, yet we plainly see him at the same time as a sinner; who is not only looking at his sins, but feeling them;—not only remembering their open appearances and their fruits, but searching them to their secret root, and pursuing the painful, but necessary, examination after the lurking remainders of his sins.—In returning home after such search, he sits down with this reflection (even holy David sighs, and says) “In *sins* hath my mother conceived me”—sins, in the plural—for a single sin, like a single spring, may be the source of rivers to overspread and drown the soul.

But the principal person, to whom we should have recourse in this matter, is Jesus Christ.—And need we ask him, if all men
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are sinners? who came down among us for the salvation of all men? — If all men were to be saved, all men were sinners; for Christ says, “He came to call, not the righteous, but “sinners, to repentance;” which distinction implies, not that, among mankind, some were righteous, and needed not salvation, and some were sinners, and wanted it; but, that all mankind, being sinners, needed that salvation, which, had they been righteous, they would not have wanted. — Our Saviour allows none to be good, perfectly so, but God alone; and, whatever degrees there may be of imperfect goodness, in beings between God and man, ’tis certain, man is deeply plunged in sin: the very best among us, our Saviour tells us, are but unprofitable servants — have no claim of merit of our own, upon God. He teacheth us in our prayers to acknowledge ourselves sinners, and to ask righteousness of God—a direction, surely, that comprehends us all: even those, who for their actions may appear good, yet may still be sinners; for Christ tells us, that they are the sins of the heart which defile us, and that evil thoughts, as they lie open to God’s knowledge, are open to his condemnation, and sufficient to denominate us sinners.

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This being our condition, as he hath described it who best knows it; and who came to rectify it; it is plain, that, however sins of all kinds may belong to our nature, there is no sin belonging to it so absurd, and so mischievous, as the sin of that pride, in which we justify ourselves before God, as if by any of our own deservings we could claim upon his mercy and favour.—This therefore at once leads us to that humility of mind, which teaches a right knowledge of ourselves, which is the first necessary step towards coming at a right knowledge of God; nor can we be any where better taught these points of knowledge, than in the scriptures; which are the word of God:—there lies our best instruction, and our safest examples: there we learn to think of ourselves as God directs us to think, and as holy and good men have always thought of themselves under his direction, that is, with humility, as feeling more of sin than of righteousness within us, and such righteousness as we have, very imperfectly applied. For there is, surely, great imperfection in our best works. We do not love God so much as we are bound to do, with all our heart, mind, and power—we do not fear God so much as we ought to do—we do not pray to God, but with great and many imperfections;—

fections;—we give, forgive, we believe, we live, we hope—all imperfectly;—we speak, think, and do—imperfectly;—we fight against the devil and the world—imperfectly—as if we were more willing to be conquered than to conquer.

These thoughts of ourselves will prompt us to repentance and humiliation, in the sight of God, to acknowledge our sins and imperfections—which the proud sinner, perhaps, may not stomach; but the humble man will gladly do what the prophet David and St. Peter have done before him, and say, “O Lord, I am a sinful man.” Our Saviour, whose instructions reached to every human duty, and to every human feeling, has left us the picture of the returning Prodigal:—in that picture every man may see—what he is—what he has to do—and what he is to expect from God. As to what he is, in himself, with his sins about him, and only his own thoughts to feed on—he is nothing better than a tattered prodigal among swine, and feeding upon husks, — The Prodigal’s humiliation, “Father, I have sinned,” procured him the best robe, and admission to his father’s family; and, by the like conduct, man procures the salvation of Christ, and thereby admission to the kingdom of God.

I say,

I say, the salvation of Christ — for, sinners as we all are, we cannot, of ourselves, procure our own, or each other's salvation. Some of us are greater sinners than others, but any of us is too much a sinner to deserve salvation for himself, much less for others. — We are sheep, (the scriptures call us so), that are gone astray from the fold, where only we are safe; — like them, we are too weak and silly to find our way back of ourselves: — if our good shepherd, Jesus Christ, does not lead us back — we are lost.

We have then no reason to glory in ourselves; the pride we feel in being rational and intelligent, is dashed at once by feeling that we are sinful creatures; and the merit of our utmost virtue vanishes, at the thought of our own imperfection, and the perfection of him, who is to judge us; — whose tribunal the most confident dare not challenge, and the humble will ever approach it, in holy David's strain —
 “ Enter not into judgment with thy servant,
 “ O Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living
 “ be justified.”

SERMON

S E R M O N LXXV.

ON GOOD-FRIDAY.

H E B R E W S ix. 26.

Christ hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

CH R I S T's sacrifice of himself for the sins of mankind, is the great article of our religious faith. As a matter of fact, the truth of it rests on the scriptures, which also acquaint us with the design of it—that it was an atonement to God for those sins. — The scriptures are the word of God.

This important fact then admitted on the testimony of God himself, it hardly becomes us to ask the question — whether all this was necessary? Those who believe the fact thus stated, will not mistrust the necessity of it, whether

whether they can discover such necessity or not ; but will easily admit that conduct to be founded on the wisest necessity, which, they have reason to believe, is the conduct of God.

“ We live by faith ;” and in our present state are more concerned to believe God, than, in every thing, to understand him. Not that our faith should set aside the use of our reason in matters relating to the Divine conduct ; only let us not extol it too much, and think there is nothing lies beyond, more than we can discover by it. We are fond of enquiring into the fitness and propriety of the Divine conduct. The enquiry is, doubtless, commendable, and our duty, so far as it is modestly conducted ; it is a useful, but it is a nice employment of the mind. The fitness and propriety even of human actions, are not discerned without care and difficulty ; they are not to be determined by a partial view. Wherever there are connections and relations, they must be seen and considered, or our judgment will be wrong. If then we are liable to be misled in our judgments about human conduct, because we cannot see all the connections by which the several parts of it are united, how much more liable are we to falter in our examination of the Divine conduct, the
parts

parts of which lie farther from our view, and where the connections which run between them are more nicely laid.

When we consider God as an all-powerful creator, and man as a frail creature—God full of mercy, and man full of repentance—we can hardly help persuading ourselves, that there are no external means necessary to bring these objects together, which seem so naturally connected.—Was man the only rational creature under God's government it might be so.—But when we consider God as maintaining an universal government through the various extent of all creatures, we can suppose no otherwise, than that the rule of his conduct is as extensive as his government. We see but a part of one amongst an infinity of connections, which all center in the Divine wisdom, and are thence spread forth to support the whole; and therefore we ought not to determine the fitness of God's conduct, by comparing it only with that connection in which we stand.

A criminal before his judge may consider himself as sorry for his crimes, and his judge, as having it in his power to pardon him; he may consider farther, that humanity and pity are mixed with the authority he stands before, and, perhaps, may feel some alleviating cir-

cumstances that plead in his own behalf. With these notions only before him, no wonder if he thinks the judge would do right to pardon him; but spectators of the trial feel other considerations besides those which the criminal indulges; they see the conduct of the judge connected with other circumstances besides the mere condition of the criminal, they see it connected with the good of the community, and the support of government; and, as his conduct is connected with these circumstances, they see it reasonable that it should be directed by it.

When God called Adam to answer for his transgression, he stood before him in this character, and in this situation, convicted of dishonouring God's authority among myriads of beings, who were waiting the event of the judgment, and whose behaviour might be influenced by the nature of it. They were witnesses of the breach, which was made of God's authority by Adam's sin; and highly reasonable it was that they should be witnesses too of some method which God should take to vindicate that authority.

The case will be the same, if, instead of Adam, we set his whole posterity in his place, and, without supposing them concerned in their

father's guilt, make them chargeable only with their own. All mankind are sinners on their own account, and, though a numerous list of sinners, are yet but a small part of God's government; we stand surrounded by myriads of fellow-subjects, and what we do or suffer may extend an influence on others, though we are not sensible of their observations, or of the invisible connection that subsists between us.

Such reflections as these may lead us to conclude, that it was right and fit for God not to forgive mankind merely upon their repentance; since, admitting us to be, what we certainly are, but a part of God's government, his conduct towards us must be directed by what he sees suitable to the other parts of his government, not by what we feel to be agreeable to ourselves; and general reasons of government may make it as fit for God to refuse all mankind a pardon, as to refuse it to any individual transgressor: — both may be condemned upon the same principle, the necessity of vindicating his authority by a public example for the support of his government.

Where then shall the mind of man next turn itself for enquiry? Death, we see, was

due for man's transgression. The next step which reason would wish to take, if it knew how, is, that, as man is doomed to fall a victim for the vindication of God's honour and authority in his government of the world — if any method can be found, which would equally answer the great and important purpose — it might be fit for God to accept it, instead of man's destruction. — Where to look for this method reason knows not. — Some satisfaction, we see, was necessary — but, who shall make it? — All mankind together could not make it; therefore no one individual could make it for the rest. The method of salvation then, if any can be found, must lay somewhere above mankind.

Revelation carries us up so high as to shew us, it was the Son of God who made it; — in this it shews us what is truly wonderful and gracious; and yet the mind is apt to drop its gratitude, that it may indulge its vanity, and, from wondering at the *greatness* of this circumstance in our salvation, turns to questioning the *necessity* of it. But the same reasons which justify the Divine conduct in not forgiving man without an atonement, may lead us, though not to discover, yet to acquiesce in, this method of making it.

God

God forgave not man without an atonement, because the reasons of his universal government made it fit and right that he should not. These reasons were, that the honour and authority of his government might be supported through the whole extent of beings who were subject to it. Now, however high some orders of beings are above us, still they all are creatures—all subject to the government of God: so that superior beings seem not qualified to make satisfaction for the misbehaviour of their fellow-subjects, whilst they stand accountable for their own; perfect as their own obedience may be, it is no more than they strictly owe the Governor of the world, nor have they any superabundance of merit, by which they may supply the deficiency of others.

If the only requisite for making satisfaction for the sin of man was this, that the party who undertakes it should have no guilt of his own, superior beings had been qualified for that purpose, and, if so, had been employed, for God goes no farther for the execution of his purposes than is necessary; that God went farther then, is a plain proof that more was necessary—and that was, that the person who undertakes the satisfaction

should not only be above the guilt, but above the condition of the sinner; now, though angels are, comparatively with us, in a higher state than we are, yet are they, relatively to God, as Governor of the world, in the same condition with us:—higher creatures they are, but still they are creatures; and, as such, subjects of God's government as well as we; and God, by not appointing their mediation on our behalf, and appointing only His, who is the express image and partner of his own eternal Godhead, hath given this awful testimony to the dignity of his government—that no creature, who is subject to it, is qualified to atone for transgressions committed against it.

I have placed the reasonableness of Christ's interposition to atone for the sin of man upon the common argument—the vindication of God's authority, and the honour of his government. Nor have I extended the argument farther than it is understood to reach, by taking the government of God in its largest meaning, not as confined to his government over man alone, but as comprehending his universal government over all rational beings. The argument receives additional strength from this extent; and the Divine conduct in requiring

requiring an atonement for man yields a quicker satisfaction to the mind, when we consider God as doing it in the character of universal governor, than when we consider him only as governor of mankind. The latter seems to be too narrow a view for fully comprehending the amazing work of our redemption by the Son of God, which, as it is the greatest event that can possibly be conceived, cannot have its whole effect confined to one, and that so small a part of God's government—I had almost said, so inconsiderable a part of it — but the embassy of the Son of God among us forbids us calling it so.

It is true, that, supposing mankind the only subjects of God's government, it would have strengthened their awe of it, to find, that nothing less than the interposition of the Son of God could atone for transgression against it. And, as this is a useful effect, we cannot presume to say, it was not sufficient for setting the cause to work which produced it — yet, when this great step in the Divine conduct was decreed, the race of mankind was not in being. God and our first parents were alone in the garden of Eden; and if we might suppose them then alone in the universe, the usual arguments against the necessity of an atonement for their transgression would run very strong.

In such situation there had been yet no government, the authority of which must be supported against the influence of a bad example; and the repentance of the creature, with the mercy of the Creator, might have wrought strongly, perhaps effectually, for a reconciliation, when there were yet none to abuse it.

It raises our idea, and strengthens the propriety of God's requiring an atonement for Adam's sin, when we consider him not concerned alone with Adam and his posterity, but presiding over a government which had subsisted before Adam was created. Rational beings for ages had been God's subjects, had circled his throne rejoicing and obedient. Indeed the ambitious revolt of some had made a chasm in the heavenly host, and afforded a public example of rebellion against God, and as public an example of the punishment that it incurred. After this revolt of the rebellious angels, Adam was created. It looks as if mankind was intended to supply the place in heaven which they had forfeited, and as if Satan, through envy and resentment, was resolved to hinder it; for Adam had scarce surveyed the garden of Eden before Satan found him and tempted him to his revolt.

We cannot suppose this transaction less public to the observation of God's subjects than the
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the former, or that God had a less extensive regard to his general government in his management of the one than he had in his management of the other.

God, in the fall of the rebellious angels, gave a public specimen of his anger; in the fall of man he gave a public specimen of his mercy, yet so tempered as to be at the same time expressive of his justice and his righteous jealousy for the support of his authority. Satan, with defiance, renounced his allegiance; Adam, through temptation, failed in his duty. The former had no pretensions to forgiveness, the latter found it, though under conditions; the former was thrown headlong into punishment, the latter had the Son of God to step forth, not only to plead, but to die for his forgiveness. — Was all this done only to justify God's conduct before man, and to support his authority over him only? All the rational part of God's government is concerned in it; it is a lesson to all intelligent beings — to man it is both a lesson and a blessing.

In this extensive scene of an universal government, God's conduct with fallen man stands in a proper light — this is indeed the scene, in which it was really exhibited; — and the objections, which are usually thrown against the manner of our redemption, seem to arise from

from considering it in a too narrow and improper way.

If man will sit at home within himself, and fancy the universe made for his advantage and amusement alone, and that God hath no other care than to govern and direct him, he may often wonder what God is doing; but let him send his thoughts abroad, let him send them a flight above this spot of earth, and, instead of measuring God's conduct by such petty instances of dominion and reasons of government, as are to be met with among us, let him survey God influencing and presiding over an infinite and eternal kingdom, amidst numberless orders and degrees of beings, whose stations are such, and so connected with each other and to God, that they make up one entire harmony of infinite dominion — let him view this general scene of God's government, and then let him drop into himself, and try whether the scanty frame of human experience be a fit model of Divine wisdom — let him censure the Divine conduct, because it agrees not with his little projects — in short, let him, if he can, persuade himself that the universe was made to envelope man, and not that man was made to be a part, and that a small one, of the universe.

We may bring this remark nearer to ourselves; —

selves;—and in applying it, it comes with greater force.

Superior beings saw the majesty and authority of God in his not forgiving us without an atonement; we not only see the same, but, what is more, we feel his love and mercy in forgiving us upon an atonement.

If, on the one hand, it would be too partial a judgment upon this part of the Divine conduct to suppose it wholly confined to ourselves, it would certainly, on the other hand, be a much worse judgment upon it, to suppose all other beings concerned in it but ourselves—that they should be kept obedient by what they see, and we not be bound to be so by what we feel.

Whatever be our real place in the scale and order of beings, as God views it, so far as we can look, which is only a little way below us (we have no visible prospect above us);—so far as we can look, we can discover, that we are placed just above the brute part of the creation, the lowest of all rational creatures; who may rise in perfection, as they do in order, above us, by infinite degrees, till they approach the nearest to, though even there infinitely distant from the Godhead.

From this view of our situation, what must we think of ourselves, when we find such an extraordinary

extraordinary step taken in our favour, as was taken? Surely we have been distinguished in the dispensation of God's general government of the universe; from whence it is not more reasonable to conclude, that his protection of us in the particular government of mankind is sure and ready, than it is to acknowledge, that our obedience should be proportionate to the extraordinary love, as well as the ordinary care God shews for us.

Beings above us had transgressed, and were consigned to eternal loss of bliss—Why was our transgression pardoned, and our happiness recovered for us? It is a question which fills the mind with wonder; but if it does not fill it with gratitude also, we lose the blessing we so much wonder at.

Indeed, when we reflect *who* it was that interposed on our behalf, and *how* he interposed, we may answer the question—Why was our transgression pardoned? So great an advocate as the Son of God could not plead in vain; so great a price as his blood could not fail of purchasing what it bid for. But then, how shall we answer the question which still remains—Why did the Son of God step forth to plead and suffer on our behalf? What an instance is this of God's care for the general order of his creation, that he would not suffer so small

small a part of it to be lost ! Besides this, what a tremendous vindication of his authority does it afford, that, to save so small a part, such extraordinary means were requisite ! But, above all, what a gracious instance is it of love in the Son of God, that, extraordinary as these means were, he readily stepped forth to undertake them, and left the glory of the Godhead to execute them in the humility of human flesh !

If these reflections amaze us, as well they may, let us seriously return home to our own hearts, and there ask, not only what *is* man, but what man *ought to be*, that the Son of God is thus mindful, thus anxious for his salvation. If we must needs ask, Why he has saved us thus — let us ask it, not with a view to the secret steps and reasons of Divine wisdom, by which he advanced, in making this astonishing proposal, and putting it in execution, but let us ask it, with a view to the end, for which he came down among us and executed it. The secret steps and counsels of divine wisdom, in appointing our salvation through the sufferings and death of his Son, may be inscrutable by us ; but our own steps to happiness, through obedience, in consequence of it, are open and plain to our understanding, as well as within reach of our abilities. If the end, for
which

which the Son of God came down and executed his great proposal was to shew us these steps, to recover our capacity for happiness, and teach us to pursue it, let us diligently attend to his directions; and if we wonder at his salvation, let us have faith in its efficacy, and study not to frustrate it.

The happy spirits above sang for joy, when they saw the Son of God quit the bosom of his Father, and come down to be born among us for our salvation. They still are witnesses of our conduct, and wish to see us continued the favourites of the Son of God, by a careful discharge of that love and obedience to him, which he has purchased at so extraordinary a price of his own blood — they are waiting with brotherly attention, till we have passed through our probation here, and shall be called to sit down with them in the kingdom of heaven.

What think we then will be their disappointment, to see us at last forbid to take possession of those seats, as ungratefully unworthy of them! — If they were once amazed to see such love and care bestowed upon us, what will be their astonishment to see such love and care abused and frustrated!

But if their disappointment and amaze
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will be great, what will be our own! — how must their righteous concern ashame us! — how must the presence of our gracious Redeemer confound us! but above all, how must his indignant sentence appall us, which banishes us from the regions of bliss we have not deserved, and sends us, through the tender reproaches of happy saints, to the taunts and tyranny of infernal spirits!

Let the devotion of this day then fill our minds with sentiments suitable to the great, the wonderful event it commemorates; and, from reflecting on the death of Christ, let us resolve to live with humility, and to “live unto righteousness.” Let us cast our thoughts to the cross of Christ, and look on him who was pierced for our sakes. — There let us read, how odious sin is in the sight of God, when we see, how costly a sacrifice was requisite to atone for it! Let us learn to tremble at the Divine justice, which spared not the Son of God, to come at the satisfaction which was due to it; and let us well consider, if such affliction fell on him for the sins of others, how dreadful will be our portion, when God calls us to punishment for our own.

Yet, let not our hearts be terrified; we
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may read still another lesson on the cross of Christ—we may read comfort as well as terror there; —it shews us that, odious as sin is in the sight of God, yet he is loth that the sinner should perish.

We have God's own gracious word for this. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked."—And, had not his own word assured us of this, his own beloved Son, hanging on the cross, most eminently declared it; for so loth was he that sinful man should perish, so much still he loved him, that "he gave his only begotten Son, to the end, that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John iii. 16. Thus the same important instance of Christ's death, which makes us tremble at the justice of God, gives us encouragement from his love, that as the former may affright us from sin, so the latter may persuade us to righteousness.

Who does not feel encouragement to seek the God of Israel, when he hears him regretting the punishment of sinners in these tender expressions of his prophet — "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, O Israel? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together."

Hos. xi. 8.—And shall we not hasten to the God of Christians, who, besides his expressions, has given such an example of his tender mercy towards sinful man?—He who delivered up his Son for us all, how shall he not with him also freely afford us the pardon we seek, and readily accept us to that righteousness, and that favour we solicit!

If this be too weak to move us—see where our Redeemer hangs expiring on the cross! and listen how he addresses us from thence—

“All this for you! for you I undergo this shameful misery, in exchange for the glory of my Father’s kingdom. For your sakes am I counted as a lamb appointed to be slain.—And why? why do I thus suffer? the just for the unjust, but that I may bring you to God! Behold what manner of love is bestowed upon you! I am wounded for your transgressions, I am bruised for your iniquities, the chastisement of your peace is upon me, and with this blood are ye healed.—I die for all; that all who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness; and follow me to my Father’s kingdom, which I left, that I might shew you the way thither, and where I go,

to prepare a mansion, an eternal mansion, for those who love me and follow my commandments.

After this declaration from the cross of Christ, which our religious faith forcibly delivers in our hearts, what are we to think of Christ, and of ourselves? — of his love, and of our duty? of his condescension, and of our advancement?

That the Son of God should take man's nature upon him, and in that nature suffer death, to redeem man from death, and make him immortal and eternally happy, is what angels look at with wonder, and, could angels envy, not without envying us for a situation, which is even above their appointment. They have been *created* only, we have been *created*, and we have been *redeemed*; and so redeemed, that the honour we derive from the method of it, and the immortal glory we are to receive as the consequence of it, sets us at least on an equality with angels—perhaps in a superiority above them.

When we look at man through the medium of Christ's redemption of him, how enlarged does he appear! and if it be wisdom for man to know himself, his best method for getting that knowledge is to look at what Christ hath done,

done, and what he intends for us — to look at Christ's past and present love, and at our future glory. If we look at man only as a rational creature, we see what is wonderful in him, his illustrious faculties, and their important uses ; but when we look at him as the cross of Christ sets him forth to view, as intended for that immortality which the death of Christ hath purchased for him, we see human nature scarce inferior to divine, as we see him a partner with the Deity in the high attribute of immortality. The death of Christ demonstrates the immortality of man — for when God bleeds, can we suppose he bleeds for a being who is here but a short space of time, and then is no where, and no more ?

No ! the death of Christ sets eternity before us ; — his life was employed in teaching us how to make it an eternity of glory and happiness, by our obedience to what he hath commanded us, as well as faith in what he hath done and suffered for us. This is necessary, as well as reasonable — that we should work with the means of salvation which Christ hath set before us, if we would be saved. Without this we may not expect to rejoice in our eternity, and in our being partners with the Deity in the high attribute of immortality, unless we be

partners with him in the still higher attributes of purity and glory ; — for accomplishing which, we must make our way, through the religion Christ hath set us, to the kingdom he hath intended for us.

To conclude :

As Christ's religion is the best foundation, both of our duty here, and of our happiness hereafter, so the scene of mount Calvary lays the best foundation for Christian religion in our hearts. — In that scene the noblest truths, and the strongest motives, assault the soul with a violence, short only of compulsion ; if love be alluring, or if terror be awful : in that scene the highest instances of both operate together on the soul, and fill it with a religion, which raises man above himself — which, even in this state of frailty, trouble, and of death, gives him a vigour almost divine — by which, amidst the evils of this world, he fixes his attention on immortality, and feels not the disorders of this mortal state, which dishearten and devour those who cannot or who dare not look beyond them.

May we constantly hold fast and apply this religion, which Christ came down from heaven to set before us, and which he set before us to conduct us thither, through a short state
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of probation upon earth to an eternal state of happiness in his kingdom of heaven. — To whom, therefore, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

over. Amen.

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S E R M O N LXXVI.

ON COURTESY.

I P E T E R iii. 8.

Be courteous.

AMONG the duties which support society and adorn Christianity, courtesy, when rightly applied, demands a place. Religion is the foundation, on which we must build all our actions, whether they relate to God, ourselves, or others, and if this foundation be well laid, the superstructure will be secure; yet there may be room for something more to make it beautiful. A Christian's principal aim is the approbation of God; but the approbation and esteem of men, though it be an inferior, is, however, no contemptible part of his study.

As God hath placed us in society, he hath

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obliged

obliged us to all the duties which reasonably belong to it; and there is a reasonable and general obligation, which leads us to do whatever lies in our power to make each other easy, and to restrain all such actions as may make each other uneasy. In consequence of this general obligation, we feel a reason for treating each other not only with justice, but also with civility; for it is not sufficient for our happiness, that we meet with those actions from others, which we can strictly demand of them, unless they will still farther supply us with those which we can better wish for than demand: and as, in the distribution of the natural good things of life, we may be maintained if our necessities be supplied, but are not happy unless farther provision be made for our conveniences—so in our behaviour to each other, we may not complain, if we meet with that which is strictly due to us, and yet may not be satisfied, unless we have something more. We depend upon each other's assistance, not only in procuring what we want, but in enjoying what we have; and when the justice of our neighbours has served us in the former, their courtesy will much assist us in the latter.

A courteous

A courteous disposition to protect each other's happiness, is a necessary security against the many inconveniences which threaten us: such a disposition makes us not only useful but agreeable in society; and when the stronger duties of justice and honesty have led us to deserve the love of mankind, courtesy will lead us to obtain it. For we often see that the best men are not the best beloved; which arises, not from any dislike we have to their good qualities, which they really possess, but from a disappointment in not finding some that are necessary: they may not want any thing to make them good men, but they may want something to make them agreeable, the supply of which defect would not hurt the merit of their other sufficiency; for I do not mean that, in order to make himself agreeable, a man should give up any one virtue that he has, but that to all the virtues which he already has, he should add another, consistent with them all, and, as much as his love of God will allow him, endeavour to obtain the love of mankind.

Courtesy consists in adapting our behaviour to the reasonable expectations and dispositions of others, and avoiding whatever may, reasonably, give them offence or distaste.

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It is founded upon a moderate opinion of ourselves, and a favourable opinion of others; a want of these always produces that sort of behaviour, which is contrary to the virtue we are recommending, and is the source from whence many disorders arise which disturb mankind. Too much thought about ourselves naturally robs others of that share of it which is due to them, and, by making our own happiness the only view of our actions, we must often discompose the happiness of others in order to come at it; but, if men are not too attentively engaged in contemplating their own merit, they will find leisure to take notice of the merit of others—and, if they are not romantically bent upon making themselves more happy than they can be, they will be at liberty to assist others in being as happy as they may be.

The rules of unaffected courtesy are plain and easy; but the refined additions which are made to it are more intricate, and less useful. It is always so; — what is really necessary is generally easy to come at; but what our own false taste makes necessary, is not so presently had; and, would we but attend to it, the labour we are at in accomplishing our wishes might often warn us, that we wish wrong.

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I. It is one general rule of courtesy, to treat others with that respect which is due to them.

Every man, as he is a member of society, has a right not only to his share in the natural good which it produces, but to the general good opinion and regard of others. To live is not sufficient for our happiness here, unless we can live with reputation; the good opinion of others both secures and heightens our enjoyment of this world's benefits, and such only despise it who do not deserve it.

There is nothing which more sensibly wounds us than disgrace. Self-love makes us jealous of the superiority which others may gain over us, and, if it does not hinder us from paying them what is justly due to their merit, at least it makes us demand what we think due to ourselves with great exactness: it is true, many set their accounts too high; yet, when we are disposed to consult the happiness of others, we even in those cases adapt our behaviour rather to what they think of themselves, than to what the world thinks of them—because, if we really mean to make others happy, we must be directed by what are their sentiments; the rather, because if we are too nice in not paying all that they expect, there is a danger of paying them less than they deserve;

deserve ; for there are many titles upon which men claim respect from each other—more than some are aware of, who behave, as if a single deficiency in another, disqualified him from every kind of respect, and as if a single merit of their own entitled them to all they can ask for.

Our good opinion of others cannot be made known to them but by our expressions and behaviour ; this is the only evidence we can give of it : and, therefore, to disappoint others of that testimony, which is expressive of our good opinion, is the same thing as to refuse them the good opinion itself.

All men, it is true, do not stand in the same degree of our good opinion, which rises in proportion to our knowledge of their merit ; yet, even where we have no knowledge of another's merit, courtesy will lead us to give him that respect, which we have no reason to refuse him ; for we ought to think well of every man till we have reason to think otherwise of him ; and though he is not entitled to all that behaviour from us, which is due to a friend, yet, as he has done nothing to make him unworthy of that, which is due to him as a man, we ought to shew our humanity, though not our esteem, and treat him as we would desire to be treated in the like circum-

stances. This sort of behaviour towards others carries with it such a recommendation to their good opinion of ourselves, as none but the proud will think they have no occasion for; it gives their judgment a turn in favour of us, and inclines them to take more notice of our good qualities, and less of our bad ones, than they otherwise would do. This prejudice of others in our favour is an advantage, which we all want more or less; — at least, few characters are perfect enough to stand the disadvantage under which the contrary behaviour would throw them, if their uncourteous treatment should provoke others to take more notice of their failings than their virtues. Courtesy, therefore, is not only reasonable, but useful, as it places us in a fair and advantageous light; — and, which is still a farther advantage, whilst it directs others to such a knowledge of us as we would desire they should have, so it introduces us to such a knowledge of them as we want; for those are ever most open in a discovery of themselves, who are best pleased with what they discover in another. It is true, we must wait for experience before we fix our esteem; but should we treat all men with a suspicious severity, till we are assured they are fit objects of esteem, we should never come together. As
mankind

mankind cannot live without each other's assistance, that must certainly be a more proper behaviour, which discovers a readiness to treat with others for a mutual assistance, than that, which contemptuously throws them from us, and at once disqualifies us for their favours, and forbids them to expect ours.

But farther — when, besides the principle of humanity, men have a title to our respect from their personal merit, the expression of it in our behaviour is both a reasonable reward and an useful encouragement to them; and the refusal of it hurts not only the person, but the public, as it not only withholds what is due to the former, but discourages the cultivation of those virtues, which are the support and ornament of society. It is true, men of real virtue will not pursue it, merely to gain respect; but it is as true, that respect is a reward, which naturally belongs to virtue, and therefore to withhold it, is unjust; and, though honour be not the true foundation of virtue, it is, however, the ornament of it—and if some would not be less virtuous without it, yet all are more pleased with it—and, considering the weakness of human nature, it will be always useful to make men pleased in the performance of what they ought to do. Such therefore as deny the just tribute of a courteous respect, where merit

openly shews itself, are enemies to the public good—and, as their behaviour throws an undeserved reproach upon others, so it brings this just one upon themselves, that they are destitute of that merit in themselves, which they treat so coldly in others ; nay more, that they not only are destitute of merit, but that they hate it : for we may meet with those, who will reverence that virtue in another, which they have not in themselves ; but to discountenance merit in another, shews that we not only want it, but despise it.

Besides a man's personal merit, his station in society may give him a title to our respect, the refusal of which is a farther injury, not only to him, but to the public. For, as it is a necessary consequence of our social condition, that there are various stations appointed in it, so it is necessary, that the stations into which it is distributed, should be treated with that respect which is due to them. It is moreover a private injury ; because, to deny a man the respect that is due to his station, is a step towards depriving him of the real advantages which belong to it ; because the disrespectful behaviour of one may introduce the contempt of more—and, as every station is dependant on the assistance of other parts of society (which assistance is always directed by their opinion) when

when a man comes to be generally despised in his station, he will be as generally neglected, that is, he will lose that assistance from others, which he wants for the proper discharge of the duties belonging to his station—and which he loses, because he has lost their good opinion of him.

Even in those cases, where the man is less deserving of respect than his station, it is a reasonable indulgence to give the former that respect, which is due only to the latter; for, should every man be treated merely according to his own desert, and no protection allowed him from the station he is in, the business of society would be at a stand for want of certainty in the management of it; and we should be all in confusion, if we did not oftentimes direct our behaviour towards others according to what they are in society, rather than by what they are in themselves. — I mean our common behaviour on common occasions; for on extraordinary occasions a bad man has no right to protection from his station; so far from it, that the higher and more important his station is, the greater is his crime, and the greater should be his punishment, in behaving so as misbecomes it.

S E R M O N LXXVII.

The same Subject continued.

I P E T E R iii. 8.

Be courteous.

ANOTHER general rule of courtesy is — to carry our own virtues with modesty and moderation, so that they may be an example to all, but an offence to none.

It is from not observing this rule, that good men are often instrumental in hurting the cause they would protect; when they think, that their abundance in virtue not only gives them a right to the esteem of others, but an authority to demand it, and to treat all such with severity and disrespect who are deficient in it. Men of this temper seem not content with the secret and reasonable applause of their own conscience for what they have, unless they step out, to make others uneasy for what *they*

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have not—when by an immoderate value of their own virtues, and as unreasonable reproach of other men's failings, they make them offended at what they ought to imitate, and so fix them faster in the folly, from which a courteous method of treatment might have withdrawn them. To make men practise virtue, we must first make them approve it, which will hardly be done by making it uneasy to them; and when we set our virtues before others for our own glory and their shame, we must not wonder if they turn their backs upon what gives them so much pain to look at. On the same account unseasonable and severe reproaches are an improper method of recommending virtue; for though the advice they carry be wholesome, it is mixed with too bitter ingredients to make it palatable.

There is a natural jealousy in our tempers, which makes us desirous of being masters of our own resolutions and of our own actions; every encroachment upon this prerogative brings distaste; and though in many cases we are obliged to bear with it, and in others may think it prudent so to do, yet every man is anxious to maintain and display this privilege whenever he can. It is in consequence of this principle that men chuse rather to be left to
admire

admire virtue, than be forced to approve it, and to follow, rather than be pulled after it: their resolutions of leaving folly they would have to spring from their own sentiments and experience rather than from an unlicensed authority, or an impertinent severity; and, sensible of the merit of being virtuous, are jealous to have that merit all their own.

The courteous man complies with this natural disposition, and takes the properest method of doing good with his virtues, by making others admire rather than distaste them: he recommends them to the imitation of others, not by ostentatiously holding them out to view, which rather dazzles than delights, but by letting them work, silently, though not unseen: he turns his view from a fond admiration of his own, and directs his care to help the virtues of others to shine, by removing such obstacles as may hinder their operation, and by a generous allowance of the applause which must support and encourage them.— He is a lesson to others, but not a pedagogue—he is content that his example should be his instruction, and leaves men to make their own advances after him, and take the merit of their virtue to themselves: his strongest reproaches of other men's vices are his own better behaviour.—

viour.—It is thus he wins men to the love of virtue, by making himself agreeable who is endued with it, whilst a contrary behaviour lays an unjust prejudice against virtue, by giving us a just distaste against those who profess it.

Another general rule of courtesy is — to distinguish between the vices and the humours of men ; and, after observing that strictness in our behaviour, which gives no just encouragement to the one, to make that allowance, which gives no unreasonable indulgence to the other.

Man is not only under the dominion of reason, but of fancy ; and, would we do him full justice in a definition of him, we must say, that he is not only a rational, moral agent, but also a whimsical one. In consequence of this weakness in our nature, it is not sufficient for our happiness, that we chuse right in matters of moral good and evil—nor is it sufficient that we chuse with prudence in matters of natural good and evil ; there are still other desires, which must be satisfied, and which, though with respect to their objects they are more indifferent, are oftentimes more restless and busy than others of the greatest importance. Reason has very little to do in the management of these

these desires, they are beneath its notice; and if reason does not interpose to forbid them, we think our humour gives us sufficient authority to pursue them, and we follow its directions with as much serious eagerness, as if we had the most important reasons on our side; whilst others, whose humour is fixed on different, though not on worthier objects, smile at our choice and our pursuit, and we return a smile at theirs:—this is natural and excusable; for it is as natural to smile at folly in another, as it is to overlook it in ourselves.—But if we would shew that regard for each other's happiness which is reasonable, and which courtesy directs us to shew, we must refrain ourselves from maliciously crossing and defacing these little plans and schemes of happiness, the pursuit of which serves for an amusement in the business of life, and are therefore to be allowed—not only because every man has occasion for the like indulgence in his turn, but because by such behaviour we keep men in good humour about us, which is a point worth aiming at, as it not only preserves the public quiet; but promotes the public good; for if men are disturbed in following their fancy, it may make them refractory even to the commands of reason; and we frequently see them

teazed into real faults, nay provoked into enormous vices, by an officious severity in disturbing their humour; the handling of which requires the nicest care and judgment, and, if we would attempt it with success, we must not only set out upon a proper authority, but must proceed in it with as much good-nature as good sense:—men will rather kick than mend their pace at a chastisement, which they think impertinent, and where the wisdom which inflicts it seems only intended to shew they are wrong, but does not help to set them right.

There is room to shew much ingenuity in exposing the various humours of mankind, and perhaps that is the motive, which has set so many at work upon them, whose performances have made the world merrier, but I doubt whether they have made it wiser; for though some may have quitted their foibles upon such ingenious representations, yet, as they have taken up others in exchange, perhaps the poignancy of the wit had less to do in the removal of them, than the natural inconstancy of the human temper; for though men will sometimes hide their foibles, rather than be laughed at, they will hardly quit them, till they are tired of them. But without indulging too
free

free an observation upon a point which will never want advocates so long as men take a pleasure in laughing at each other, this is clear, and will be allowed, that whatever good effect general representations of folly may have, where each man may laugh because he can apply them to others, yet particular animadversions on our personal behaviour, which oblige a man to confine them to himself, certainly do more harm than good, and, when fairly considered, serve to no other purpose, but the gratifying our wit or pride, at the expence of other men's ease and quiet; which is not only exacting too high tribute for the wit or wisdom of man; but it is abusing the talents entrusted with us, when we apply those qualities to make each other uneasy, which are given us for mutual assistance.

After all—they are the ordinary occurrences and little incidents in life, which make up the greatest part of our happiness here; and it is natural for each man to consult his own humour in his use and management of them. In consequence of this, our happiness is not only liable to be overcome by misfortunes, but to be lessened by inconveniences. It is the great duty of friendship to protect us against the former, whilst courtesy secures us from the

latter; the one, like a prudent architect, provides for the support of the fabric against storms, by a solid supply of strength—the other, like a diligent attendant, with a busy hand protects its ornaments and lustre against little accidents which may deface the one or hide the other.

So pleasurable, as well as easy, is the work of courtesy, that the neglect of it is matter of just reproach. To make others easy, and assist their reasonable enjoyments, is gratifying ourselves; for the communication of happiness reflects a satisfaction, a pleasing satisfaction, to the breast from whence it flows. This leads us to observe what others want or desire, and to watch the little inconveniences which may spoil their happiness—and, by courteously removing them, to set their lot of pleasure before them as pure and sound, as may be. Nor can it be a laborious undertaking to consult each other's conveniencies, as they fall in our way, by the common offices of good-nature—at least, to avoid such behaviour of our own as may give them trouble, cannot be difficult. Ill-nature will throw hindrances in the way of others, and rejoice to see them stumble in perplexity; but courtesy is ready to remove the difficulties which disturb us,
delights

delights in giving ease — and will stoop to every office within its reach, by which it may make others as easy and as happy as their situation will admit.

In short, to shew at once the use as well as the nature of courtesy—it is the art of making men pleased with us, by first making them pleased with themselves ;—since by rectifying the inconveniences which distaste others, we put them in good-humour to please us ; for nothing is more commonly observed than this, that when a man is uneasy with himself, it is very difficult for him to behave easily to others ; as, on the other hand, he who feels nothing amiss within, shews nothing displeasing without, but is as agreeable to others, as he is happy in himself.

Since, then, it is a reasonable and general rule, to pass through life as easily as we can — and since whatever procures us the love of others, disarms them of the mischief, and calls forth the good, which they may have in their power for us—it is a part of that love we feel for ourselves, to aim at gaining the love of others : and, though a just and religious behaviour may secure us the esteem of mankind, it is by a courteous behaviour that we must gain their love.

It

It is too true, that this agreeable quality may be much abused, by being too much refined, and, like other good qualities, may prove as pernicious in its excess, as it is useful when moderately cultivated. A nice enquiry into the excesses of it, suits not this place—I shall therefore leave that to your own observation, and only make this short reflection upon it.

Plain, unaffected courtesy is the result of good sense and a good heart; a want of good sense makes our behaviour degenerate into rudeness and absurdity, and the want of a good heart makes us refine it into cunning. The man of no courtesy, and the man of too much, are both wrong; the one neglects the cultivation of a very useful and a very agreeable quality, the other misapplies it; the one often disgraces virtue by the want of it, the other often embellishes vice by an extravagant use of it.

S E R M O N LXXVIII.

ON MYSTERIES.

DEUTERONOMY XXIX. 29.

*The secret things belong unto the Lord our God;
but those things which are revealed belong
unto us and to our children for ever, that we
may do all the words of this law.*

MOSES says this after setting before the Israelites a repetition of their covenant with God; in which he shewed them the mercy and goodness of God, their rule of duty, and the danger of disobeying it.

In this review, the Israelites saw much to excite their admiration—the wonderful works which God had already wrought in their favour, and the no less wonderful promises by which he encouraged them. All which might well exceed their comprehension.

Then

Then they saw their duty plainly laid before them, and as plainly enforced by the strongest motives for observing it. The wonders belonged to God, they were his work—theirs was, to do all the words of the law.

Not that the wonderful parts of the Divine dispensation so belonged unto God, as in no sort or degree to belong to man. It belonged to God alone to *perform* them; but still it belonged to the Israelites to *think* and *meditate* upon them, and to make the wonders of God the motive and support of their own obedience.

“ God is wonderful in all his dealings with “ the children of men;” and the Christian, as well as the Israelite, finds matter of admiration in what is set before him; and, to a sublimer law than was laid upon the Israelites, sees sublimer mysteries annexed than they were taught to look at;—which, though it belongs to God alone to comprehend, yet it behoves the Christian to look at them with a pious attention, that the wonders of God’s love may strike him with reverence to his laws, and that a devout admiration may promote a sincere obedience.

That we have nothing to do with what we do not understand, is commonly said, but is not
universally

universally true. It is not true in religion, where we are expressly called to the duty of faith. We have something, and that not a little, to do with whatever God thinks fit to tell us. God may tell us what is above the reach of our understanding to comprehend, which if we set aside—I do not say from our *enquiry*, for such matters are not proper subjects of our enquiry; but if we carelessly, (much more if we disdainfully) turn them out of our mind, we affront the majesty of God. It is our duty to hear and to believe God, though it depends upon his wisdom how far we may understand him. When God spake to his people by his prophets, the people paid attention, they believed, but they did not always understand what they heard—the prophets themselves did not always understand what they uttered.

Christ's disciples were frequently at a loss to understand him; he told them many things beyond their comprehension; but they never for that reason treated his discourse with neglect. Persuaded as they were that he was a teacher sent from God, they thought every thing he said worth hearing; and were so far from not troubling themselves about what they did not understand, that per-

haps they erred on the other side, and troubled Christ for clearer explanations than he thought it necessary at that time to give them. And though it be true, that our Saviour explained to them all such matters as it was necessary they should understand, yet it is as true, that he expected both their notice and their faith in such things as he did not fully explain to them — and which he did not fully explain to them, because it was not necessary they should at present understand them.

If this was a reasonable conduct of our Saviour's to his disciples, we have no pretence for neglecting what he has revealed to us, merely because we do not understand it. Our Saviour meant to exercise the faith and submission of his disciples, when he spake to them of matters too hard to be understood; and it is with the same view, that he has left us to read and to believe some things in his Gospel, which are beyond our comprehension.

Faith, in its strictest acceptation, is doubtless a part of the obedience we owe to God — who certainly has the same right to command our assent and attention to what he says, as he has to command our attention and obedience to what he enjoins; and our assent, without our attention, to what God tells us, is like

our attention without our obedience to what he commands us—a very partial discharge of our duty. If we say we will not trouble our thoughts with what God has declared beyond our understanding, we may as well say, we will not trouble ourselves with what he has commanded beyond our inclinations.

Religion employs the whole of man; the operations of our mind are no less subject to its control than our actions;—to say truth, our actions are so only in consequence of our thoughts being so, and religion directs our external conduct, by first influencing and directing the internal faculties of the mind. That God has a right to the obedience of the mind will admit no doubt; and that faith is a proper exercise of such obedience is as clear. God proposes some things to be believed by us merely and solely on his authority—this is commanding us, this is exercising our faith, this is properly trying the obedience of the mind. Should God make this fully clear to our conceptions, this would be, not commanding, but instructing us—it would not be exercising our faith, but improving our knowledge—it would not be trying the obedience of the mind, but enlarging its faculties.

So far, then, is it from being true, what some would pretend, that where mystery begins

gins religion ends. This must be wrong, if faith be any part of religion, and very much so, if it be the foundation of it. The observation means, that there is no religion in believing what we do not understand—or, in other words, that we are not bound to concern ourselves in those matters, which God himself declares to us, exceeding our comprehension. If this be true, there is an end not only of this or that particular article of Christian faith, but of the whole system of our redemption through Christ, which is all a mystery. And perhaps those, who approve of the observation, understand it in this extent, and would willingly enough set aside Christianity, because it is mysterious. But for those who are friends to Christianity, and yet think themselves not concerned about the Trinity, they should be very cautious how they make that a pretence for neglecting a part, which, if true, would be a reason for neglecting the whole of their religion.

To hear men say, they will have nothing to do with mysteries, when they daily live in the midst of them, is itself wonderful. What is the daily preservation of our animal life, what is the conjunction of soul and body, what is the general course of nature, but a mystery above our comprehension? We see effects,

effects, indeed, and some have looked for natural causes of those effects, with very good success; but besides that the most inquisitive can look but a little way, all that they can discover is but still more mystery. The daily growth and annual restitution of plants is mysterious; and does the philosopher set us clear of mystery in this matter, when he tells us, that the sun and the air are the cause from whence this effect arises? and though he can minutely trace some steps in the process of vegetation, does it not still remain a mystery that such a cause should produce such an effect; and still more, that the same cause should produce such variety of effects as are seen in the great variety of plants about us?

These are natural mysteries, which I presume no one will refuse to have any concern with because they are so—or that he will reject his food because he cannot comprehend how it is prepared for him. If you say you are content with such mysteries, because the senses shew you that such things are, though you know not exactly how they are—there is, I say, the same plea for spiritual mysteries declared upon the undoubted word of God; *that* shews us, as sure as the senses, nay surer, that such things *are*, though we know not *how* they are.

And this is all we have to do with spiritual mysteries—to believe that such things are, and, by attending to this belief, to follow such reflections as properly arise from it. We are not concerned to know, nay we are forbid to know, how they are, and *that* it is which makes the mystery.

This distinction between the doctrine and the nature of a mystery, between considering that a thing *is* so, and considering *how* it is so, is sufficient for directing our judgment, and shewing us what is our duty in this matter, and how far it extends; and a serious Christian may be easily led to this conclusion about the mysteries of his religion—that they are, in the first place, objects of his faith; that they are, in the second place, subjects of his meditation, so far as to consider that such things *are*; but they are not subjects of his enquiry, so as that he should examine *how* they are.

Yet some, not content with making these the object of their faith, are for making them the object of their understanding, and for studying what they ought only to think upon with reverence. Now, though we may not admit the observation, that, where mystery begins, religion ends—yet we may admit this, that, where mystery begins, study should end.

Studying

Studying to explain mysteries is inconsistent, presumptuous, and dangerous.

1. It is inconsistent; — because if God thinks fit to set mysteries before us, for a higher exercise of our faith, it destroys their design to explain them. Mysteries are no longer so when they come to be understood; they are then objects of knowledge, not of faith; — not that there is any danger of man's thus disappointing the designs of God. Whoever attempts it, instead of removing one mystery, makes more, all human explanations being, as they must need be, as unintelligible as the mystery itself.

2. It is presumption in man to pretend to see what even angels are desirous to look into. Whether they are permitted to look, or whether they are able to comprehend it, is more than we know; — but this we know, that we are not angels; that, as men, we are much at a loss to comprehend many things relating to our own nature, and the designs of each other, and consequently we presume extravagantly beyond our short-sighted condition, when we pretend to understand matters relating to the nature of the supreme Godhead and the councils of infinite wisdom.

3. A curious enquiry into the nature of

our sacred mysteries is dangerous, as it encourages pride, and may lead to infidelity. Such enquiry arises from pride, from a conceit of our abilities in seeing farther into abstruse matters than others can; which conceit leads us on, from being wise above our fellows, to being wise in defiance of God's restraint and prohibition. In gratifying their pride by such pursuits, it is strange to see how men deceive themselves, how they pursue their imaginary deductions with much self-applause, and mistake their own vain admiration of their process, for conviction.—A mind thus heated hurries into confusion, and some have come to disbelieve what at first they set out to explain; not content with the limits of a reverential faith, and aspiring to a presumptuous knowledge, they first fall short of what they aim at, and then, as is usual in a disappointed pride, they scorn to return to what they left.

Between the two extremes, of being thoughtless about our holy mysteries, and employing too much thought about the nature of them, lies the true point on which we should place our sentiments, and from whence we may make that use of them, which God, who hath set them before us, intended we should make.

As

As we cannot well suppose that God sets any article before us, for the object of our faith, to have no notice taken of it (which is a reason why we should not neglect to think of it); so we may well suppose, that he sets no article of faith before us for our notice, which is not intended for our religious improvement (which is a farther reason why we should give it all the attention which the subject will admit);—yet should we say, that God has set mysteries in the work of our redemption, to employ the mere faith of man, it were not too much, as this seems a suitable way of adapting his dispensation to the disposition of man, who is better kept to his duty by admiration than by knowledge.

We see this every day in transactions which pass among ourselves. We are naturally apt to disregard what is plain and intelligible, and to fix our attention on what is wonderful and difficult. We are less struck with a favour, when we can explain how it came to us, than when the manner of its coming surpasses our understanding. The more intimate we are with a friend, the less forcibly do we feel ourselves affected with any particular instance of his kindness; but when a benefit comes from a high hand, of whom we

know but little, and still less of the manner in which he hath conferred the favour, it raises our admiration, admiration keeps up our attention, and attention directs our gratitude.

That more should be done for man's salvation, than man can comprehend, is not wonderful. What is man? Where is he placed in the extensive line of beings, that he must needs have a distinct view of all powers, and will hear of nothing that he cannot see? Does not man himself every day provide for the safety and government of creatures below him, in a manner beyond their comprehension? and may not, does not God provide for our daily preservation, in ways past our finding out? Is God then allowed to be mysterious in taking care of our welfare here, and must he be explicit in providing for our happiness hereafter?

The serious Christian, when he reflects on the mysteries of his redemption, particularly when he attends to what the Gospel tells him of the three blessed persons in the Godhead who are concerned in it, instead of turning away with a careless neglect or contemptuous disbelief of what he does not understand, will look up with a grateful wonder, when he considers that all this, which is so much above his comprehension, was directed for his salvation.

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The mystery of the Trinity points out to us the vast undertaking in redeeming man from sin and misery, when such persons were concerned to bring it about — which cannot but remind us, at the same time, what an obstacle sin is in our way to happiness, which required such strength to set it aside, as well as how odious it is in the sight of God, when such interposition was necessary to appease his anger against it. The mystery, though inexplicable in its nature, plainly shews us this, and this we are concerned to look at, and to meditate upon, that we may avoid that bar to happiness, for the removal of which such means were once applied, but will be applied no more.

This mystery, so incomprehensible by our weak capacities, convinces us of the infinite distance there is between God and man, and prompts us with that humility and submission which becomes us. God's thoughts are far above our thoughts, and his ways above our ways. We cannot understand his wisdom, we cannot comprehend his nature. Why has God thus set himself out to man, enwrapt in clouds of majesty, but that we should learn to adore and to submit to that wisdom, which we cannot measure, and to reverence and fear that

Being who is beyond our thoughts to apprehend?

What farther calls our attention to this great mystery, is, that as it shews us the infinite distance between God and man, so it shews us the greatness of that love he has expressed, and still continues to express for man, and thence prompts us to a suitable love for him, and ready obedience to his commands. Behold what manner of love is bestowed upon us! — which, at such distance, has looked down to save us, and still interposes to direct and to support us. This, I say, we may behold in this great mystery, dark as it is, and this we are concerned to look at with our whole attention, that we may thence draw vigorous resolutions of not frustrating that love and care, which is so wonderfully bestowed upon us — which, if it be infinitely greater than we can comprehend, is for that reason infinitely too great to be despised.

Lastly.—Our contemplations on the Trinity are of this use—that the less we feel ourselves able to comprehend it, the more we feel the imperfection of our present state, and consequently the more strongly we direct our wishes to a better. What God sets before us as mysteries now, are not so in themselves, they are only
only

only so to us, in this low and cloudy state, from whence, as through a glass, we discern them very darkly, and in part only; but there will be a time, when we shall no longer know in part, but that which is perfect shall come, and that which is in part shall be done away. Our short-sightedness here, then, in looking at the mysteries of our religion, prompts our impatience for that better state, where we shall see them clearly; nor can it prompt our impatience of getting to a higher state, without reminding us of that duty, by which we must qualify ourselves for our arrival there.

To conclude.

He who is wise will thus think of the Trinity: — he will not profanely disbelieve what God hath declared — he will not contemptuously neglect it, as a subject no way fit for his thoughts, nor will he presumptuously enquire into it, as a subject every way fit for his understanding; — he will look upon it as a strong and awful testimony of God's love for man — of the redemption to happiness which is wrought for him — and of the spiritual care which continually protects him; of all which so much only is shewn him now as is sufficient for his instruction and encouragement in this state, but from which he may well hope for
the

the much clearer view, which shall be opened to him in his reward hereafter. Hence he will learn to praise God for what he does see, and to prepare himself for what he is not yet permitted to look at; which would be too bright a view for these eyes of flesh, and which their eyes only shall behold in a more perfect state—whom holiness hath qualified to see the Lord.

S E R M O N LXXIX.

O N D E A T H.

 P R O V E R B S xiv. 32.

The righteous hath hope in his death.

TO make life easy, is the study of every man : but to make death so is the main point ; a point to which we are not quite so attentive as we should be. So far from it, that we anxiously deny it a place in our thoughts ; and, being accustomed to look upon it as the greatest evil which can befall us, we are afraid to indulge a contemplation upon it. Every accident, which brings it to our mind, brings an enemy to our repose, and we fly to any company to get rid of it.

But this is wrong, on two accounts. For, 1. supposing death to be the greatest evil which
can

can befall us, yet, as it will certainly happen, we ought to prepare ourselves to meet it in the best manner we can, which we shall never do if we do not think about it before it comes. By teaching ourselves to expect evils, we teach ourselves not only to bear them, but to make the best use of them. If, therefore, death be an evil, it ought to be treated as such. The expectation of it might be of use before it happens, and teach us to bear it as becomes us. But if death be not really an evil, and if a right contemplation of it may be a means of rendering it the greatest good to us, this highly aggravates the folly of refusing it a place in our thoughts.

There is, it is true, in all men a natural aversion to death; which the Author of our being has implanted in us for good purposes, and which we cannot expect wholly to conquer. Even St. Paul desired rather to be clothed upon than to be unclothed, and wished that mortality might be swallowed up of life. But this natural aversion belongs more properly to the sensitive than the rational part of man; and, where it is not heightened by causes of our own procuring, will stoop to reason and religion. It is a matter of the utmost importance to

to be able to entertain the expectation of death without horror, and meet it without reluctance: because the same steps which lead us to such a temper of mind, lead us to goodness and happiness—and because without this disposition we lose the enjoyment of the little good which human life may have in store, and aggravate the severity of the evils that belong to it, whilst we are under a perpetual alarm for what we cannot hope to escape. On the other hand, by calmly and religiously enquiring into the true nature of death, and by accustoming ourselves to such a disposition of mind and of behaviour, which an enquiry of that nature will naturally suggest to us, we by degrees are reconciled to the contemplation. We relish the innocent enjoyments of life, without doating upon them, and can bear its afflictions with consistency and courage—and when death calls us, we feel only that reluctance which belongs to our sensitive part, which religion quickly removes, and we obey the summons, as the summons of a friend.

I hope, therefore, I shall not be thought to have made choice either of a useless or a melancholy subject, if I endeavour to lead your thoughts

thoughts to such considerations, as may reconcile us all to this unalterable condition of our natures; and may teach us to meet death with that confidence, which becomes those who call themselves followers of him who has conquered death, and disarmed him of his terrors.

1. If we would consider the true nature of death, we must carry our thoughts back as far as to the first occasion or cause of it.

— If Adam had not sinned, he had not died.

He was created capable of a state of immortal happiness; and, by virtue of a positive covenant with God, would have been entitled to it upon his obedience; but, as he was disobedient, he fell; and was sentenced to return to that dust from whence he was taken. In this sentence the whole posterity of Adam was condemned to death; for the ancestor having forfeited his right to immortality, his posterity must lose it too. Thus mortality passed upon all men.

The truth of this is evident from the terms of the covenant, as it stands (Gen. ii. 16. 17.)

“ And the Lord God commanded the man,

“ saying, Of every tree in the garden thou

“ mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the

“ knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not

“ eat

“eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest
“thereof thou shalt surely die.”

The declaration of death, annexed to the breach of this command, must, in common sense, imply the promise of life upon fulfilling it; for we cannot suppose that God would enjoin Adam the observance of a command, and give that as a reason against transgressing it, which would equally befall him whether he did or did not obey it. Death is here set before Adam as the punishment which would follow from his eating of the forbidden fruit — and therefore it would not follow but upon his eating it: whoever prescribes a punishment to any action, prescribes it with this intent, that it should discourage the performance of it; and therefore what he prescribes must be consequent upon that action only, for otherwise, it is so far from being a sufficient, that it is a very improper, discouragement of it. The denunciation of death here given to Adam upon his transgression, contains a promise of life upon his obedience, and this promise so given is plainly a covenant between God and Adam, and consequently, from the nature of a covenant, it follows, that Adam was entitled to immortality if he per-
formed

formed the conditions on which it was proposed.

What the nature of that immortal state was which Adam lost by his transgression, is not material for us to know, and therefore God has thought fit to shut it from our discovery. This we may plainly gather from what has been already mentioned, that it was an immortal state of happiness. God creates nothing in a state of misery: the existence of his creatures is the work of his hand, the misery of that existence the work of their own folly. God created Adam for a state of immortality, and therefore for a state of happy immortality; for what had Adam done, or what could he do, before transgression, to deserve a state of misery?

Without indulging, therefore, a fruitless enquiry after the circumstances of that state from which Adam fell—how great his happiness would have been, or in what manner it would have been conducted—let us be content with knowing what God's own word has warranted, that immortal life and happiness then would have been the reward of Adam's obedience had he persevered in it; but, as he was disobedient, he was sentenced to return to that dust from whence he was taken.

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But,

But, "as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." The redemption which Christ hath wrought for us is a recovery of our title to that state of immortality which Adam forfeited; and as, in consequence of the curse, the grave might have for ever shut its mouth upon us, so, in consequence of the satisfaction and mediation which Christ hath made, it shall return us again to life; and we shall be translated, after death, to that blessed immortality, which, if man had never sinned, we should have been translated to, without passing through the gates of death.

This is the groundwork of Christianity, and what St. Paul very largely enforces upon all whom he would instruct in the true nature of that religion. What Christ did for us, he constantly styles a recovery of what was lost—a redemption of what was forfeited—and a reconciliation with God: and when he tells us that Christ hath procured us a seat in heaven, and eternal life, we see from the nature of that gift which we receive from Christ, what the nature of that loss is which we derive from Adam;—a loss of that immortal life to which Christ hath again begotten us—a loss of that seat in heaven which Christ hath again pur-

chased for us—and a loss of that favour with God, which his anger for the sin of man had withdrawn, but which his love, for the merits of Christ, hath restored.

In consequence of this, and to satisfy us that we shall be called up to that happy state from which Adam fell, we may observe what pains he takes to remove the objection which the common mortality of man might lay in the way of this important doctrine. He gives us the strongest reason for expecting a resurrection after death, by inculcating the undeniable example of it — Christ's resurrection from the dead; and bids us look upon this as a security of our own translation from death to life, from this state to a better.

If we consider death in this light, it loses its horror. If it was no more than a mere exchange of the fatigues of human life for the quiet of a state unvexed with trouble, it were an exchange devoutly to be wished: but considered as the first step toward a restitution of that happiness which God at first intended for us—the loss of which was sufficient to call down the Son of God from the bosom of his Father to recover it—we must look upon it as a change of misery, or at best of the most imperfect

perfect happiness, for the highest joys our nature is capable of receiving.

Did death open this change to all the sons of men without distinction, there would be no occasion for any lessons against the fear of it. Certain experience of trouble here, and certain hopes of happiness hereafter, would carry us with great cheerfulness to the borders of the grave: but when the advantage of the change depends upon our own behaviour, and what we are to meet with beyond the grave depends upon what we are doing here, this makes us hesitate at the proposal, and, from an anxious mistrust of our merit in this life, feel a reluctance in exchanging it for another.

As a farther necessary step, therefore, in our meditations upon death, we must seriously reflect upon our own condition and behaviour.—Through Adam's sin we die—through the righteousness of Christ we shall live again:—but it is through our own obedience that we must be happy. Christ hath purchased us a title to immortal happiness by his blood, and proposes it to us on condition of our obedience; when, therefore, death calls us to the entrance of that immortal state which Christ has opened, it is our obedience which must give us confidence

and courage in our admittance, because it is that which must be our title to the happiness of the state into which we are entering.

But here arises a material question—Where is that obedience which shall give us courage at the gate of eternal life?—If by this question is meant, where is that perfect obedience which may demand the acceptance of Christ—it is no where to be found. But if you would ask, Where is that obedience which Christ will accept? I hope it is common; and that upon this plea millions of millions shall surround his throne rejoicing. Will the Son of God, whose love for man was so ready that he died for the pardon of his offences—will he exact unsinning perfect obedience from the creature, in favour of whose frailty he has shed his blood? Look into his Gospel, the law by which he proposes we should live, and by which he proposes to judge us. We there find, besides the most amazing proof of his compassion for the past failure of man's obedience, the most tender provision against his future frailty. His commandments are not grievous, which he has laid down, and yet, reasonable as they are, he has provided against the frequent breach of them, and has left
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this direction, as full of ease as it is full of love

— Repent, and be forgiven.

In our examination, therefore, of that obedience from whence we are to draw our comfort in meditating upon death, let us not be confident, and think we have no occasion to apply that remedy for our failures which Christ hath left us—whose pity for our weakness shews his knowledge of it; nor let us despair, and think it ineffectual for the purpose to which he has ordered it, who prescribeth nothing in vain.

Repentance is, indeed, the natural consequence of sin; but that it is an effectual remedy for the guilt of it, is wholly owing to the gracious declaration of Christ's Gospel: in virtue of his merits and mediation, that disposition of mind which otherwise had been a source of wretched despair, is now made a recommendation to favour and happiness, and we can, from a sincere and well-grounded contrition, look back upon our past offences, though not without shame, yet without despondency; and, from our present better obedience, may look forward toward happiness, though not with confidence, yet with encouragement. — Confidence but ill suits the frailty

of our condition ; and daily experience convinces us, that the greatest warmth of our resolutions is no security for the execution of them ; — but it would as ill become our condition, as the redeemed of Christ, not to take encouragement from his promises, who demands, indeed, the performance of our duty, yet offers to accept our perfect penitence, with our imperfect obedience.

Where then is the sinner who cannot furnish himself with this necessary qualification? who cannot lay his hand to his heart and be sensible of, and sorry for his sins? and who will not, in consequence of such a disposition, sincerely ask forgiveness of them at his hands who has invited him to ask it? For though vice may over-rule the will, yet it cannot so far blind our understanding but that we must see it is wrong ; nor are the pleasures of it so steady and constant, but that pain will sometimes force its way, and make us feel it is so. Why then do we not repent? or rather, why, when we are got thus far in the work of repentance, do we not go on? Is it harder to desire to be relieved of a burthen than it is to carry it? Or is it more difficult to ask forgiveness of our sins, than to bear the secret and severe reproaches of a guilty conscience? Or do we mistrust the suc-

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cess of our petition? Not surely from him who invites us to make it!—not from him who meets us with the grant of it!—Kneel then, unhappy sinner, and repent!—arise, and be forgiven!

If any are so strongly fettered by their vices that they cannot take these, no less easy than necessary steps in repentance, let us recommend them to the mercy of God, that his grace and pity may loose them from their bonds, and give them true repentance: without which they cannot look forward to the confines of this life but with horror; and no wonder if, at their arrival there, the fears of death should encompass them, when the pains of hell are ready to lay hold of them.

But for those who, though they cannot plead a steady obedience to the commands of Christ, yet have been careful to apply that remedy to their failures which he has promised to accept, and with a thankful faith in his merits have laid their repentance for past sins before the throne of his mercy, with sincere resolutions, and have with honest endeavours pressed forward in their heavenly calling; such surely may meet the terrors of death with an untroubled mind.

For what is there in the stroke or power of

death which can hurt us, thus prepared? The utmost limit of its power is the separation of soul and body: and when we have lived long enough to be tired of this world, and prepared for a better, the sooner such a separation happens the more welcome it must be. The vanities of this life will have but small force to detain us, when we have lived to repent of them; and our uncertainty about the particular state of the next, will give us but small anxiety, when we feel ourselves furnished with those qualifications which Christ has declared shall be our title to the happiness of it.

Whoever is advancing toward the end of life, and throws his thoughts back to what he has seen, if not experienced, in his progress through it, will be convinced he leaves more evil than good behind him; and that even the good belonging to this life is so mixed with evil, that however it might beguile the first choice, it will hardly raise a wish for the repetition of it. When we reflect on our helpless painful state of infancy—the dangers and vices of our youth—the cares and anxieties of manhood—and the calamities of old-age—who can, consistently, lament, that he is finishing a course, which, was it in his power, he feels no inclination to repeat? Collect

lect and weigh the enjoyments and the sufferances of life against each other, and, ere the balance turns, recollect the very short space of time in which they all are transacted—how short and unremembered our infancy—how youth has slipped by us whilst we were laughing—how manhood's work engages our attention, till old-age surprizes us unawares:—then shift the experiment, and weigh this speck of time against eternity—an eternity which God hath promised, and which it is in our own power to make an happy one.

Was there nothing beyond the grave—yet, after three or fourscore years fatigue in life, we might be well contented to lie down and rest; but when Christ has made the grave the gate of heaven, there is no part of our progress in which reason and religion would not encourage us to exchange this life for a better—did not earthly appetite make us relish this, and a sinful conscience make us afraid of exchanging it for a worse.

The oftener we think of dying, the better prepared shall we be for it, and consequently the more reconciled to it;—and when we would indulge this useful meditation, let these short and easy steps direct our thoughts:

1. The certainty of it is a reason why we should

should prepare ourselves to meet it.—The truest wisdom consists in making provision for futurity, and the capacity of doing this is what principally distinguishes man from the inferior parts of the creation. Foreknowledge of futurity, indeed, strictly taken, is an attribute peculiar to God: and his wisdom conducts what we call the present moment by what it sees in future ones. It is man's great interest, as well as glory, to imitate his Maker as far as his abilities will give him leave; and what he foresees in futurity (which is every thing which God teaches him to expect,) ought to influence and direct his present behaviour, and he ought to make the certainty of his death the constant guidance of his present life.

2. Death does not put a period to our life; but, as it shuts this state upon us, so it opens another, into which we must make our entrance.—This heightens the lesson of making preparation for such a call. Was death to put a period to our being, interest might direct us to make the most of this life; but, as it is not only the conclusion of this state, but the beginning of another, the same interest will direct us not to confine our reflections within a limit so much narrower than our being, but
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to make provision for a state to which we are assured we shall be called.

3. The next state contains in it that blessed immortality which Adam lost by his transgression, but which we, through Christ's merits, and our obedience, may recover.—This is still an additional reason for fixing our attention and our hopes upon it. To be lost in dust, and for ever shut up in the chambers of the grave, had been a heavy reflection to that active principle within us, which by all its operations shews the divinity of its original, and that it is not so much a *part* as a *prisoner* of this body. But when we consider, that death ere long shall set it at liberty, and that as soon as it has broke from its prison, it shall wing its way to those happy regions for which it was intended—this makes us bear our present state with patience, and expect the last moments of this life as the first moments of our happiness.

4. The conditions on which we are to recover the happiness of the next state, are such as may make every serious Christian easy in his expectation of it.—They are not conditions of an absolute unblemished obedience, but an obedience where true repentance has covered the stains which careless folly may have

have made. Let us but search our hearts with strict impartiality—the best among us will find repentance necessary, and who shall say the worst will find it useless? Christ has declared the purpose of his mercy, to accept repentant sinners; nor can we presume to set bounds to that mercy, and say, “hitherto it shall go, “and no farther.” It is no more decent to prescribe to Christ’s mercy, than it is safe to abuse it; and, as he has offered it to us upon the easy terms of repentance, we shall be indeed inexcusable if we do not comply with those terms;—but who shall say when such compliance will be ineffectual?

That men may be hardened in sin beyond the power of repenting, is but too true; but that there is a time, on this side the grave, when sincere repentance shall find no mercy, is more than we have a right to say. The repentance of any sinner, Christ sees, and Christ will judge, and if he sees it attended with that sincerity which he has required, it is allowable to hope he will accept it. There are many instances of repentance where Christ only knows whether it be sincere; in such instances, we cannot pronounce positively that it will take place, because we cannot know whether it be sincere; but for the very same reason

reason we ought not to pronounce that it will have no effect. — Take an unhappy sinner upon his death-bed, with all the outward expressions of repentance about him — What shall we say? Shall we tell him his repentance will be of no service to him, and so add to his anguish, as well as discourage him from performing a necessary duty? Leave this to God, who searches the heart of man, and may often see the sincerity of repentance when we cannot; and where there is sincerity there will be mercy.

To conclude. — We see the material point we ought to have in view in our meditation upon death — which is repentance. The sooner we set about this the better. The easiness of this work will greatly condemn our delay of it, but the necessity of it much more: the sooner we set about it, the sooner we shall be able to convince ourselves of its sincerity by a suitable practice; and the longer we defer it the greater hazard we run of being called away without any performance of it. The frequent interruptions of our obedience will require frequent repetitions of this duty; but the more we accustom ourselves to it, the less shall we have to do, and more satisfaction from the doing it.

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The call of death is uncertain ; nor is the strength of youth any better security against it than the feebleness of age : it is best, therefore, to be always ready ; and the method of preparing ourselves is, often to reflect, that we must die—and as often lay our hands to our heart, and ask ourselves this plain question—Should God demand my soul this night, can I expect mercy at his hands?—However this question might at first alarm the guilty breast, it would gradually lead us to that circumspection in our behaviour which would give us more and more confidence in the enquiry, and, by being made familiar, would be a constant source of satisfaction within us, beyond all the tumultuous pleasure which vanity or vice can yield. When we have made our acquaintance and peace with God, we may then walk on through life unruffled and secure—and when our last hour approaches, we may smile even in the arms of death, and say—“ O death, “ where is thy sting ! O grave, where is thy “ victory !”

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

